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KĀMA KALPA

THE HINDU RITUAL OF LOVE

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KĀMA KALPA

This superb production, with its beautiful Coloured Frontispiece and 224 black-and-white illustrations in line and half-tone, is the latest work of P. Thomas, who is well-known for his best-selling works "Epics, Myths and Legends of India," "Hindu Religion, Customs and Manners", etc. Based on famous Sanskrit classics like "Kama Sutra," "Ananga Ranga," and "Rati Rahasya," and on various modern works, this fascinating volume surveys the customs, festivals, rituals and beliefs concerning marriage, morals, women, the art and science of love, and sex symbolism, prevalent in India from remote antiquity to the present day. The author has also surveyed the subjects of extra-marital, pre-marital and post-marital courtship as expounded by ancient and medieval Indian classical writers like Vatsyayana, Koka Pandit and Kalyanamalla. The book is meant to give the reader a general estimate of Indian love life and has been divided into four parts: Woman through the Ages; Woman, Her Nature and Power; Poetry, Art and Science of Love; Erotic Element in Religion.

Lucidly written, this is a book that will fascinate the general reader and interest the scholar. The author has tried to show that Indians have always shown an active interest in the good things of life. The pursuit of pleasure was not unknown or forbidden to them in the ages past, and some of the ancient scholars and sages made a deep study of the subject in a systematic and scientific manner. Many of them even preached salvation through *Pushti Marga* or the Path of Pleasure, teachings that have not been forgotten even today.

The majority of the superb illustrations in the book are from temple sculptures and classical Mughal and Rajasthani miniature paintings. They have been selected with care to supplement the text with an aesthetic element. They also show the reader that the ancient and medieval Indians were a lively race interested in love and the pleasures of the senses as a means to a full worldly life; but they also believed in love, ideal and physical, as an expression for the fulfilment of the spiritual aspirations of the human mind. It is thus that the decorative art of temples, whether it be the gigantic frescoes of Ajanta or the divine sculptures of the Orissan temples, invariably represents not only the rapture of the body but of the soul as well. In the vast sublimity of Hindu thought, the amorous impulse in men and women is believed to be the perceptible expression of the vast and all-pervading Primal Power to which is attributed the creation of the universe.

Kāma sustains and maintains the continuity of life—the physical and the spiritual, the mundane and the divine—but the sages of old, like Jayadeva singing ecstasically of the loves of Radha and Krishna, warned that in the worldly lies the divine:

"And this shadowed earthly love
In the twilight of the grove,
Dance and song and soft caresses,
Meeting looks and tangled tresses,
Jayadev the same hath writ
That ye might have gain of it,
Sagely its deep sense conceiving
And its inner light believing;
How that Love—the mighty master....
Manifests himself to mortals,
Winning them towards the portals
Of his secret House, the gates
Of that bright Paradise which waits
The wise in love. . . ."

The illustration on the front of the jacket is a sculpture from the Lingaraja Temple, Bhubhaneshwar. (Copyright reserved by the Archaeological Department, Government of India), and the one on the reverse, a sculpture from Khajuraho, photographed by Amiya Banerji.

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सन्दर्भ ग्रन्थ
REFERENCE BOOK

पुस्तकालय
गुरुकुल कांगड़ी विश्वविद्यालय, हरिद्वार

वर्ग संख्या..... आगत संख्या 30 ४६२

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OR

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KĀMA KALPA

OR

THE HINDU RITUAL OF LOVE

A SURVEY OF THE CUSTOMS, FESTIVALS, LEGENDS AND BELIEFS CONCERNING MARRIAGE, MORALS, WOMEN, AND THE ART AND SCIENCE OF LOVE AND SEX, TOGETHER WITH THE PLACE IN RELIGION IN INDIA FROM REMOTE ANTIQUITY TO THE PRESENT DAY

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BHARTRIHARI'S MEETING WITH HIS WIFE

Bhartrihari who lived in the first half of the seventh century is best known for his three "Centuries" of Love, Peace, and Renunciation. It is the romance of his love and the drama of his renunciation. He says: "What is the good of unreasoning talk? Two things alone are worth having by men—either the rest of a forest-home or the enjoyment of a woman's youth with her swelling breasts and slothful gait." The gay poet was metamorphosed into a monk by the inconstancy of his beloved wife Pingala. The subject matter of the Frontispiece is Bhartrihari's meeting with his wife. He is accompanied by a number of wandering friars, as is Pingala by half a dozen of her attendants. On the reverse of the original painting is a verse which says: "The lady with the eyes of a fawn has captured my heart as a quarry and robbed me of peace and comfort of my mind. Friends! your advice proved of no avail."

(This picture and the note on it are reproduced from N. C. Mehta's Book "Studies in Indian Painting.")

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THE HINDU RITUAL OF LOVE

A SURVEY OF THE CUSTOMS, FESTIVALS, RITUALS AND BELIEFS CONCERNING MARRIAGE, MORALS, WOMEN, THE ART AND SCIENCE OF LOVE AND SEX SYMBOLISM IN RELIGION IN INDIA FROM REMOTE ANTIQUITY TO THE PRESENT DAY

CHECKED 1973

Based on Ancient Sanskrit Classics, *Kama Sutra*, *Ananga Ranga*, *Rati Rahasya*, and modern works

By

P. THOMAS

Author of
EPICS MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF INDIA,
HINDU RELIGION, CUSTOMS AND MANNERS,
WOMEN AND MARRIAGE IN INDIA, Etc.

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PREFACE

Many books have been written about the spiritual gains of India, but few about her material gains. Hence, in this book my main attempt has been to show that the Hindus are not and were never the dreamy people Westerners have taken them for; from the very dawn of history, India has taken a lively interest in the good things of life. Kama or the pursuit of pleasure has been one of the main objects of life for the Hindus, and some of the sages have studied the subject with great scientific interest; many saints have even preached salvation through Pushti Marga or the Path of Pleasure which has many adherents in India today.

The illustrations for the book have been specially selected to show that Indian art is not solely spiritual. The decorative art of temples invariably depict the rapture of the body as well as of the soul.

My thanks are due to the Director, Department of Archaeology, Government of India, for supplying many illustrations for the book and for the permission granted for reproducing them; to Mr. D. N. Marshall, the Librarian, and Mr. B. Anderson, the Assistant Librarian, Bombay University Library, for allowing me to go through the various important publications in the Library and collect material and illustrations for the book; and to Dr. Moti Chandra, Curator, Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, who very kindly permitted the reproduction of the beautiful illustrations from *Amaru Sataka*. I must also thank my cousin Miss Annie Varkey who helped me to prepare the index to the book, and Mr. Syed A. Husain of Express Block and Engraving Studios for his personal interest and supervision in the production of the blocks for this book.

P. THOMAS

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PART ONE

WOMAN THROUGH THE AGES

Chapter One

THE AGE OF MOTHERS

The traditions and ancient literature of mankind show that all nations have passed through what is known as the matriarchal phase of social development. The mother, once, exercised the same authority in domestic and social matters as the father does in our society. The father in a matriarchate is subordinate to the mother, and property is inherited through her ; the home and children belong to the mother, and the father is more or less economically dependent upon her.

This system which appears strange to our patriarchal notions is fairly common to all primitive peoples. Contrary to the general conception of masculine tyranny in savage society, the male savage with rare exceptions is found to be a tame animal so far as his mate is concerned ; in fact the position of women seems to have steadily deteriorated as civilisation advanced till, in the medieval world, woman degenerated into a chattel from which degraded position she has only just begun to free herself.

The matriarchate is the natural state of society. The savage male is essentially a nomad, a wild wanderer whom love of his mate alone could keep to a fixed abode. The female, on the other hand, has an interest in a home mainly because of her disabilities connected with the maternal function. Civilized life became possible only through the maternal instinct of the woman and her domestic interests.

What confirms the belief of modern sociologists in ancient mother right is the fact of primitive man's ignorance of paternity ; that is, our primitive ancestors were not aware that sex activities are responsible for pregnancy in women. Men and women mated solely for pleasure and had not the slightest idea that mating was responsible for the reproduction of the species. Women were thought to become pregnant as they came of age as trees bear fruit in their time. The male had no right over the children of his mate. He had, of course, some attachment to her children because of constant association and the fact that they were children of the woman he lived with. The brutally-minded, however, thought children an impediment to pleasure and even killed them, a trait of cruelty observed in certain animals at present.

And then arose in the primitive world a great biologist who discovered the true cause of pregnancy in woman. This discovery brought about a social revolution, and males began to take a lively interest in the children for whom their sex activities were responsible. Almost all our social and moral laws originated in the momentous discovery of this unknown scientist of the savage world. Even today, it may be observed, there are isolated groups of primitive people who have no idea of paternity, and among them conceptions of marriage and morality are directly opposed to ours.

For some time after the discovery of paternity, the rights of mothers remained unaltered. The status of women in all ancient civilisations was definitely high when compared to medieval times. The society of ancient Egypt was well-known for the freedom women enjoyed and the economic dependence of man on woman. The Greeks, the Hebrews, the Persians, in fact all the patriarchal nations of the ancient world had a matriarchal ancestry. And there is sufficient indication in the literature and traditions of the Hindus to show that mother-right once prevailed among the Indo-Aryans too.

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The earliest Indian culture of which we have any knowledge was the Indus valley civilisation commonly called the Mohan-jo-daro civilisation. From the excavations of a lost city discovered at Mohan-jo-daro in Sind, we find that a people, racially Dravidian, flourished in the Indus valley some five thousand years ago and had attained a certain amount of refinement in their way of life. The Mohan-jo-daro culture remains a matter of speculation and it is rash to assert that society during that period was matriarchal; but what little we know of the Mohan-jo-daro folk indicates that women held a high position in society. Mother cults predominated the religion of the people and this fact points to a matriarchate in existence or having existed in the earlier history of the community. The women of Mohan-jo-daro lived a free and active life.

The Aryans who conquered India and settled down in the country some three thousand years ago learnt many things from the Dravidians who were culturally more advanced than their war-like conquerors. Hindu civilisation, though known as Indo-Aryan, is a conglomeration of cultures, some even opposed to the Aryan. We have a wealth of information about the social and religious institutions of Indo-Aryans *after* they had settled down in the Punjab, but little is known about them prior to the immigration. The *Rig Veda*, the most ancient book of the Hindus, though essentially religious, gives us a fairly clear picture of the social and domestic life of the settlers of the Punjab.

In the *Rig Veda* there is little to support the theory of mother right. Rig Vedic society was essentially patriarchal. The deities worshipped were mostly gods, and the father was by right the head of the family. A few goddesses like Ushas, Aranyani and Sarasvati were worshipped for their charm, beauty and fascination but not for their power; the worship of the Great Mother as the Deity of Power is an essential feature of mother cults. Rig Vedic Aryans were worshippers of male deities, and goddesses were mainly adored as the charming daughters or beloveds of powerful gods. The marriage ceremony of Rig Vedic Aryans, followed by the orthodox even at present, gives further proof of the patriarchal nature of society in those days.

For traces of mother right among the Hindus we have to look for guidance not in early Vedic literature but in the *Mahabharata*, that repository of Hindu legend and tradition. In this voluminous work we come across several passages which clearly show that Hindu society was once matriarchal. The reference is probably to the pre-Vedic period; but there are indications that some post-Vedic communities also followed the ancient matriarchal traditions.

A significant passage in the *Mahabharata* plainly tells us that there was a period in the development of Aryan society during which married women were not legally and morally bound to confine sexual congress to their husbands. In a highly interesting moral situation the virtuous king Pandu tells his wife Kunti to seek another man for the sake of progeny. Pandu, forbidden by a curse to have relations with his wife and thus disabled for the propagation of his line, confides to his wife that it is not sinful for a woman to have relations with a man other than her husband for the sake of progeny. To the revolted Kunti he reveals, in the following words, the moral law of a bygone age:

"O Kunti! I shall now tell thee the practice of old, indicated by illustrious Rishis fully acquainted with every rule of morality. Women formerly were not immured within their houses and dependent on husbands and other relatives. They used to go about freely, enjoying themselves as they wished. They did not then cling to their husbands faithfully, and yet they were not considered sinful; for that was the sanctioned custom of the times. This practice sanctioned by precedent is applauded by great Rishis. The practice is yet regarded with respect among the Northern Kurus. Indeed, the custom so

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lenient to women has the sanction of antiquity. The present practice (of woman being confined to one husband for life) hath been established but lately."*

This ancient law was revised by the sage Swetaketu, son of Uddalaka. The reason for the revision is also given. Swetaketu, when a boy, saw his mother being led by a guest to her bedroom in the presence of his father. The young man, ignorant of the laws of hospitality of his tribe, grew indignant and protested against the behaviour of the guest ; upon which Uddalaka told Swetaketu that both the lady and the guest acted in perfect conformity with holy writ. The young man, however, did not approve of the usage and when he became sufficiently powerful to dictate laws to his community set up a barrier between a wedded woman and a stranger. The innovation, however, prohibited extra-marital intercourse only during a woman's Ritu (the supposed period of fertility†). The ancient law was followed outside the Ritu, but was later on modified.

The existence of this custom is attested by Vedic literature too. In the *Khandogya Upanishad* we read a story of confusion of paternity of the excellent Brahmin Satyakama. The young Satyakama sought instruction in sacred lore at the feet of a learned teacher. Before accepting him as a disciple, the teacher wished to know of the student the name of his father and of his clan. Satyakama did not know this and he went to his mother Jabala and enquired of her the name of his father. The lady pathetically confessed her ignorance in these words :

"I know not child, of what Gotra (clan) you are. During my youth when I got thee, I was engaged in attending on many guests who frequented the house of my husband and I had no opportunity of making an enquiry on the subject. I know not of what Gotra you are. Jabala is my name and Satyakama thine. Say therefore of thyself Satyakama, son of Jabala."

Satyakama, went back to his teacher and faithfully reported to him what his mother told him. Upon this the teacher accepted Satyakama Jabala as a pupil and declared his caste as Brahmin on the broad principle that only high class Brahmins could tell the truth in such a delicate situation.

The difficulty experienced by Satyakama Jabala must have beset others too. For we find in Vedic literature numerous individuals and clans who took their names from their mothers. Kadraveyas, sons of Kadru, Vinateyas, sons of Vinata, Jaratkara, son of Jaratkaru, Daityas sons of Diti, are a few instances of the kind. The Buddhist tradition also have a few names of this type. In *Majjhima* we come across Mantaniputta, son of the lady Mantani, and Sariputta son of the lady Sari.

A man or a tribe being known by the name of the mother, does not, however, necessarily point to ignorance of paternity. In matriarchal societies, even when paternity is known and recognized, men and women are usually known by their mothers.

In the *Mahabharata* we read the curious story of another sage who through legislation curtailed the freedom of women and brought about a revolution in moral standards. This sage was Dirghatamas, a name meaning 'long darkness'. Dirghatamas was of a studious bent of mind and was a scholar even before birth. While he was, one day, pondering over the meaning of the four *Vedas* and the six *Vedangas* in his mother's womb, he was disturbed by the activities of his learned uncle Brahaspati who forced himself on Mamata, Dirghatamas' mother. A long and heated argument on moral law ensued between the passionate uncle and the unborn nephew. The preaching of the learned Dirghatamas was lost on his uncle who had his will with the lady ; upon which Dirghatamas protesting that there

* Tr. P. C. Roy.

† See page 35.

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was no room in the womb for more than one, kicked his uncle's seed out of the womb. The enraged Brahaspati cursed the embryo and Dirghatamas was born blind.

Dirghatamas' passion for learning led him to seek instruction in moral science at the feet of Saurabheya (son of the divine cow Saurabhi). The sacred lore of the Saurabheya clan was naturally concerned with the 'ways of cattle' and the lore appealed to Dirghatamas. He became a master of the 'cattle cult' and initiated his young wife Pradweshi in the cult. This afforded much pleasure to the lady and brought a goodly income to her husband who practically lived on her. The activities of the family, however, became obnoxious to the colony of hermits among whom they lived and they excommunicated Dirghatamas. Pradweshi lived with her husband for a long time and had several sons. When the sons came of age, Pradweshi found herself strong enough to register a protest against the immoral habits of her husband. She told Dirghatamas that the laws of decency demanded that a husband should support his wife and not a woman her husband. This angered the sage and he demanded that his wife should remain strictly faithful to him; he even asked her not to have relations with any man after his death. To such an impossible demand Pradweshi could think of only one answer. She, with the help of her sons, threw the spiteful old man into the Ganges. Dirghatamas was not drowned, but saved himself by clinging to a raft. He drifted down to the kingdom of Bali and lived here long enough to avenge his wrongs on the female of the species. He ordained that every woman must marry and abide by the decisions of her husband and that a woman should have but one husband dead or alive.

With all the reforming zeal of Swetaketu, Dirghatamas, and sages of their way of thinking, it is plain from the *Mahabharata* that at the time of this epic there were several clans who followed the ancient law. The Northern Kurus have already been mentioned. The women of the North and North-West and those of the valleys of the five rivers are described as lax in morals. The promiscuity of Sindhusauvirakas, Arratas and Bahikas is thus condemned in a tirade:

"Father and son, mother and mother-in-law, father-in-law, daughter, brother, nephew and other kindred, friends, guests and others, slave-men and slave-women—all pair one with the other. With the men the women mingle, known or unknown, just as the longing comes to them. How should there be virtue among the befouled Madras, a byword for their unlovely deeds, among these untutored eaters of groats and fish, who drink heady drink in their houses, and with it eat cow's flesh, and then shout and laugh, sing unryhmed rubbish, follow their lusts and chatter such things at one another as they choose? How should the Madra man speak of virtue, the son of women who throw off their clothes and so dance, clouded by heady drink, that pair without heed of any barrier, and live as their lusts lead them; that make water standing, like the camels and the ass, have lost seemliness and virtue, and in all things are without shame.....Pale, big, shameless are the Madra women, clad in woolen wraps, greedy and usually without cleanliness or neatness." Again, "when the women have taken heady drink of corn and molasses and taken cow's flesh with garlic—they who eat cakes, flesh and roasted barley, and know not the ways of goodness, sing and dance, drunk and unclothed, on the earth walls of the city and of the houses, without wreaths, unanointed, and amidst drunken, lewd songs of various kinds, which sound like the noise of asses and camels. They know no bridle in their pairing, and in all things, follow their lust."*

This dreadful description of the depravity of the women of the North and of the land of the five rivers comes from their enemies and should not be taken as literally true. In fact many of the noble ladies of the *Mahabharata*, like Madri, wife of king Pandu, Gandhari, wife of Dhritarashtra, and Draupadi, came from the North.

* The *Mahabharata*, *Tr.*: J. J. Meyer.

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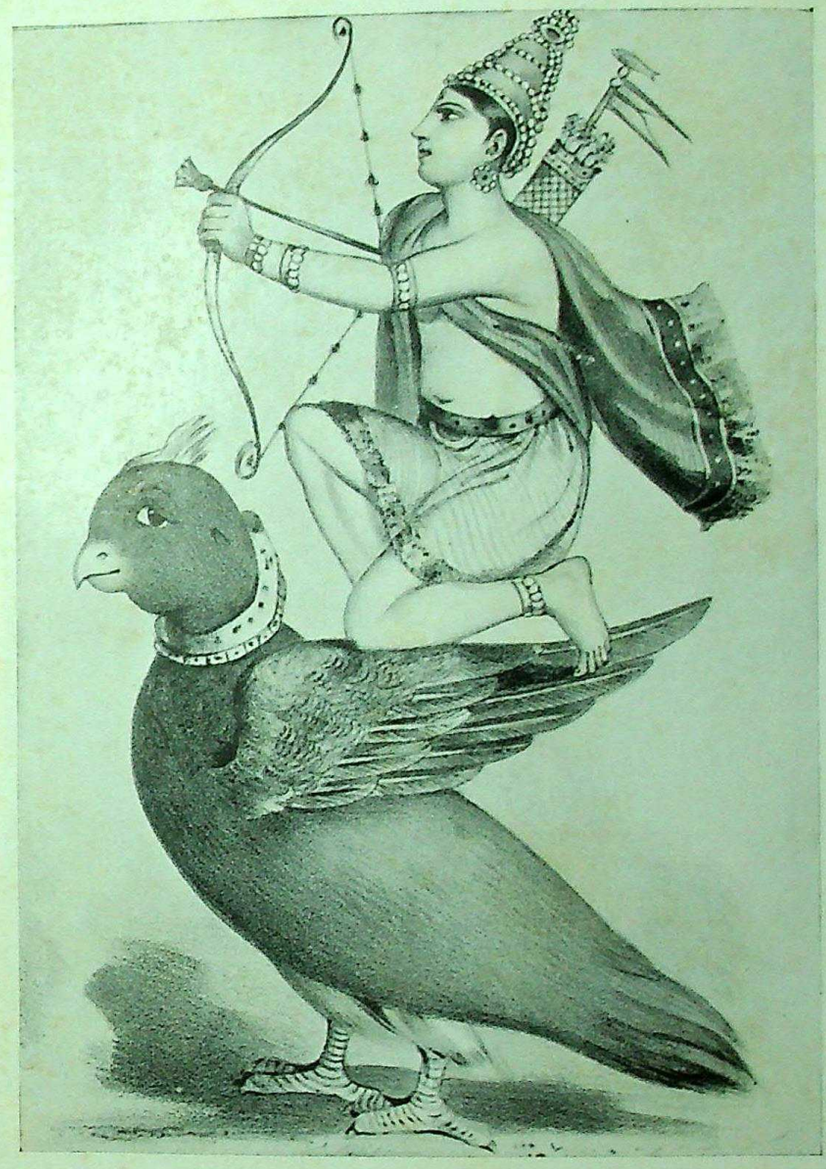

1 KAMA, GOD OF LOVE

He is the most handsome god of the Hindu Pantheon and enjoys perpetual youth. He has a sugar cane for his bow, humming bees for his bow-strings and he wounds by flower shafts. The parrot, his charger, is the Indian love bird.

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2 RATI, GODDESS OF LOVE

Vellore temple, 17th Century A. D.

Photo: E. S. Mahalingam

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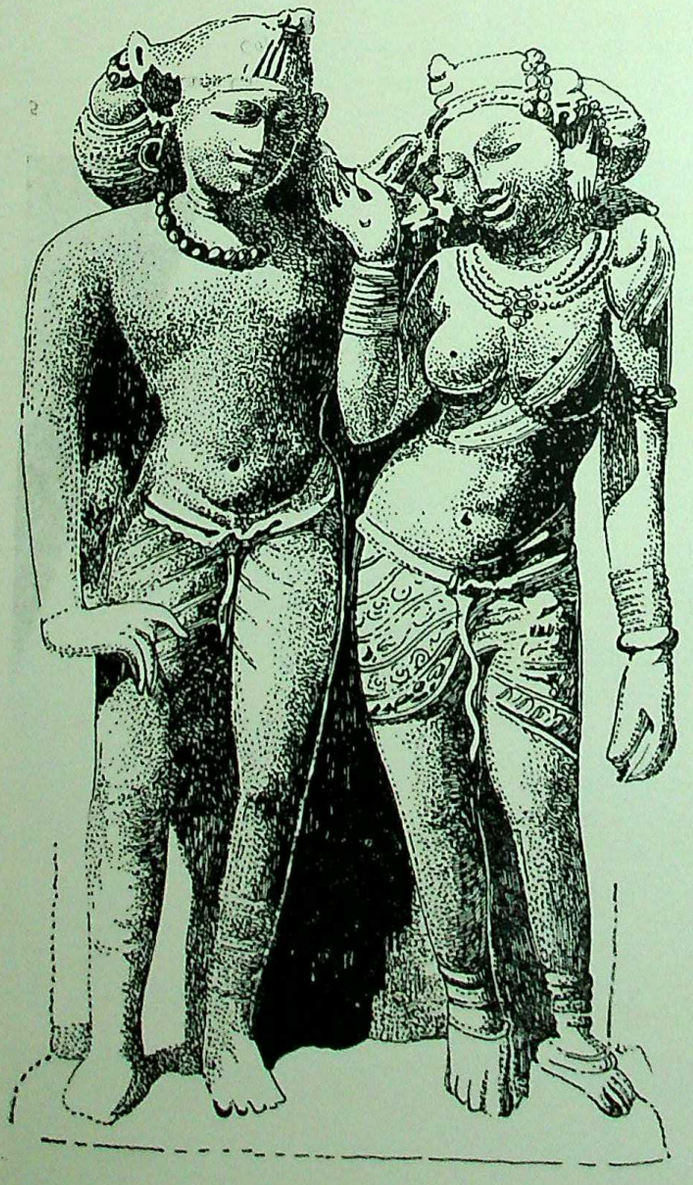
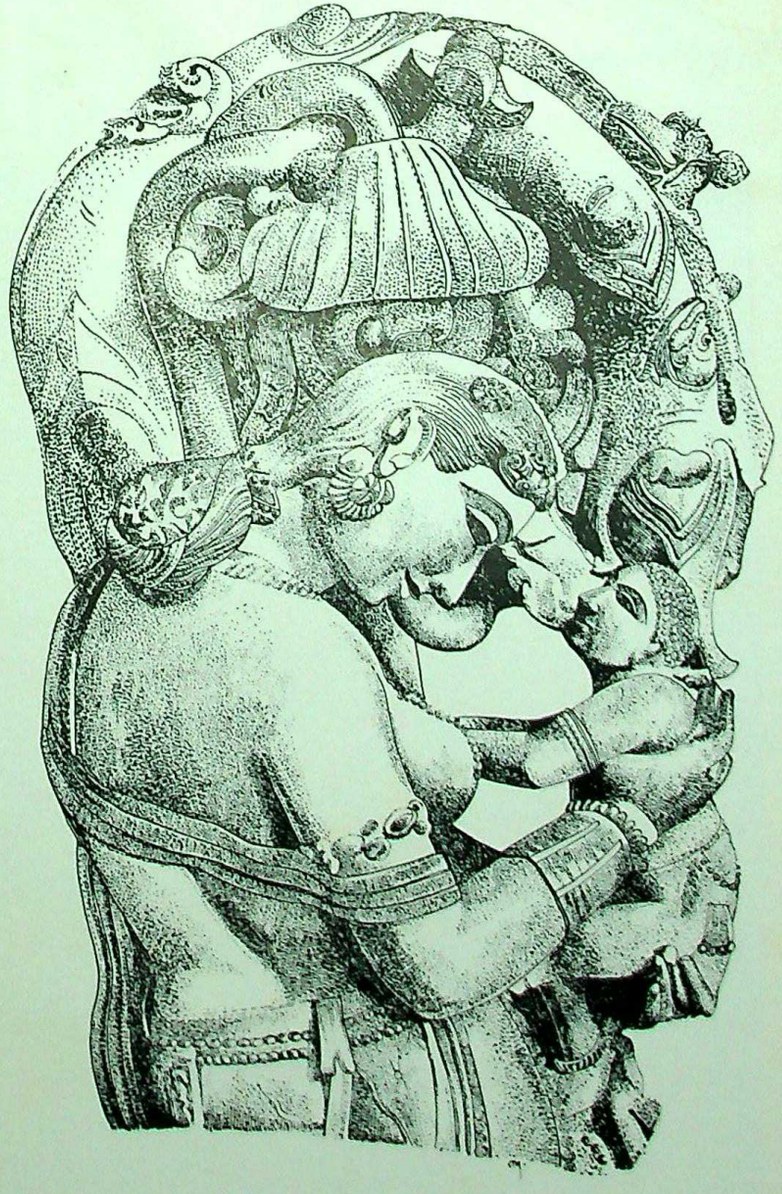


3 A LOVING COUPLE
From an Orissan temple sculpture : 11th Century A. D.



4 A FOND MOTHER WITH HER CHILD
From sculpture, Bhuvanesvar, Orissa : 11th Century A. D.

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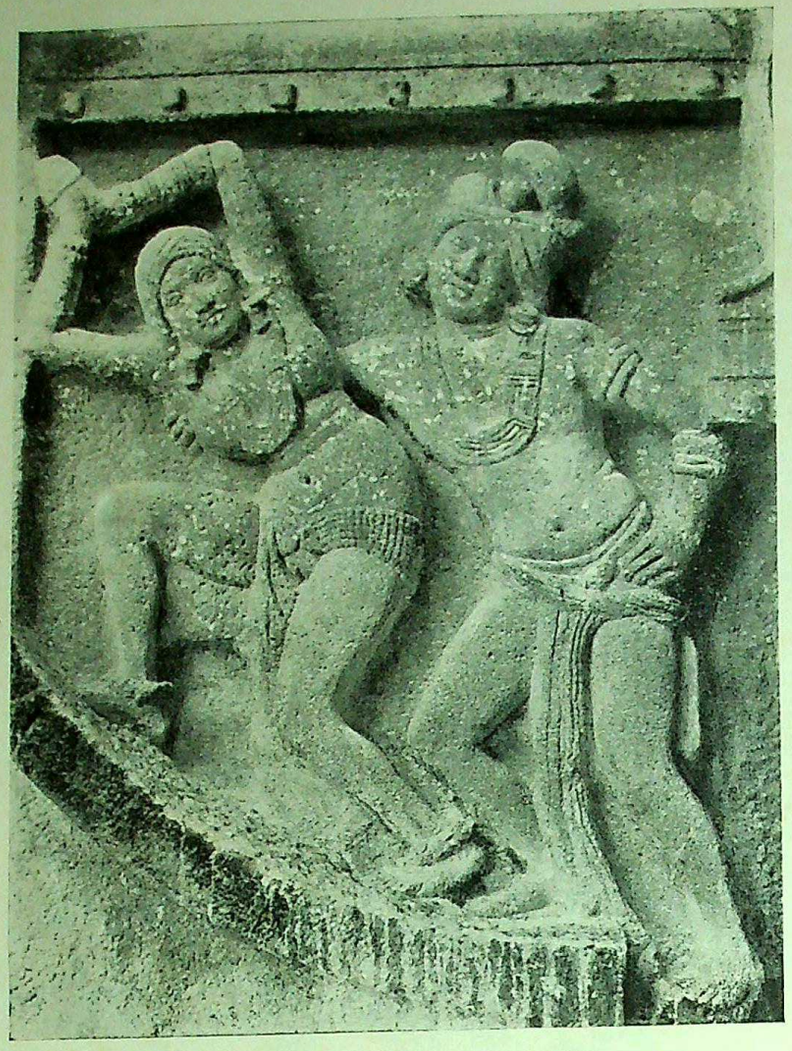

5 DANCERS
Karla Caves, Bombay State : 1st Century B. C.

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6 COUPLE
Karla Caves, 1st Century B. C.

Photo : A. L. Syed

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The reason why the women of the land of the five rivers were lax in morals is also given. Their forefathers, we are told, kidnapped and outraged a chaste woman whose curse descended upon the people and their progeny. "Therefore, too, among them it is not the sons but the sister's sons who inherit."

The last sentence is important. Inheritance through the sister's son is a definite characteristic of mother right. It is probable that the vituperative passage, quoted above, is an expression of patriarchal intolerance of mother right and not indicative of complete absence of restraint on the part of women. In fact, people brought up in patriarchal traditions usually view women of matriarchal societies as completely devoid of moral sentiments, whereas a close study of any well-developed matriarchate will show that this is a well balanced social system conducive to the development of individuality in men and women alike, the freedom of sexes acting as a mutual restraint.

Anyway, the Uthara Kurus are mentioned in the *Mahabharata* as a people living in a moral Paradise, free from jealousy and moral bonds.

The *Mahabharata* contains long discourses on virtue and morality derived from patriarchal ideas, but deviations are so many and varied that one is often left in doubt as to what is right and wrong. While polyandry is generally deprecated in the epic, the heroine Draupadi, much extolled as the paragon of virtue, has the five Pandava brothers for her husbands. Draupadi is a relic of the ancient law, and Yudhishtira, the senior husband of Draupadi, maintains that sages in the past had sanctified polyandry. This was not however the current morality of the Mahabharata period, and Karna, the enemy of the Pandavas flings it in her teeth when Draupadi was disrobed in the assembly of elders by the ribald Dussasana. He defended Dussasana's action on the plea that the ordinary rules of chivalry and delicacy did not apply in the case of a woman with five husbands; such a woman, according to Karna, was to be treated as a shameless woman. Anyway, the fact that the institution of polyandry is defended in the *Mahabharata*, even though as an exception, shows that the practice was not altogether repugnant to Indo-Aryans.

Apart from the obvious suggestion of a matriarchal past, the story of the polyandrous Draupadi throws a sidelight on an interesting institution which had been prevalent among certain Indo-Aryan communities for a very long time. This institution was the sharing of a common wife by a number of brothers. The wife of the elder brother was accessible to younger brothers though an elder brother was prohibited from having relations with the wife of the younger. The institution was probably the forerunner of Niyoga, which will be described later. Nor is it a thing of the past. Several hill tribes still practise it openly and some respectable communities secretly.

Traces of the matriarchate are also discernible in the religious literature and practices of the Hindus. There is no civilised community in the modern world except the Hindus who conceive Godhead as feminine. The Saktas, a powerful sect, of whom we will have to deal in detail later, worship God as the Mother and not as the Father. Sakta ideas permeate most Hindu forms of thought and the worst efforts of patriarchal lawgivers have not been able to dislodge from the Hindu mind his primal respect for the Mother. In the *Mahabharata* is a passage which tells us that the spiritual preceptor deserves ten times as much reverence as a private teacher, the father as much as a hundred spiritual preceptors, but the mother more than a thousand fathers; a sentiment reiterated in almost all Hindu scriptures. Even those moralists who harp upon the inherent inferiority of women sing a different tune when they deal with mothers.

Again, a peculiarity of Sanskrit literature is that when a goddess and her spouse are mentioned, the female deity is given precedence. While invoking the blessings of deities, goddesses are first addressed. This rule is observed in the construction of

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compound proper nouns derived from a couple of the Hindu patheon such as Lakshmi-Narayanan, Gouri-Shanker, etc.

From the foregoing observations the readers are likely to imagine that matriarchy is a thing of the past in India. This is not, however, quite correct. Although practically all the Hindus belonging to the three higher castes follow the patriarchal codes of Manu and his disciples, there are communities extant who follow the matriarchal social system. This system is at present mainly confined to certain aborigines inhabiting the hills, but in the Nayars of Malabar we have a fairly well-developed matriarchate. The Nayars are one of the most cultured and progressive castes among the Hindus, and in the Malabar district and in the union of Cochin and Travancore they are a powerful community with a virile martial tradition. Although the matriarchal tradition is tending to disintegrate in the towns and among the fashionable, in the villages and in the royal families of Travancore and Cochin the ancient custom still prevails. A few observations on the salient features of the social life of the Nayars will dispel some of the distorted notions people have of matriarchates.

Marriage among Nayars is not a sacrament, but quite a mundane affair permitting of divorce and remarriage. A married woman does not leave her home nor does a married man, his. In fact marriage does not bring about any domestic disruption. The husband merely visits his wife in her house at night for conjugal rights, and in the morning goes back to his house where he lives with his sisters and their children. Children live with their mothers and uncles, and are dependent upon them. The men manage the estates belonging to the household and women look after the household. The eldest male is the head of the family but he cannot dispose of movable property without the consent of his brothers and sisters.

It is bad form for a Nayar to bring his wife and children to his house except as guests for a few days' stay. Similarly, he cannot give anything of worth to them. When this rule is transgressed, the sisters usually rise in revolt and put a stop to any tendency a man may develop towards helping his wife and children. Respectable women even refuse to accept presents from their husbands, the tendency to accept presents being considered a characteristic of courtesans and women of their way of life. Thus among the Nayars there is a complete divorce of sex from economics. In patriarchates, as is well known, a woman lives by her sex whether in or out of wedlock, which viciates the whole morality of modern civilisation.

When a Nayar lady's husband is divorced, he merely stops visiting her. Divorce does not involve any economic or domestic complications. The man looks for another wife and the woman for another husband. In spite of these easy divorces, permanent union is the rule and divorce the exception.

Nayars usually marry their first cousins. Here a very sharp distinction is made between maternal cousins and paternal cousins. It is considered the right of a young man to marry the daughter of his maternal uncle, but he is not permitted to marry the daughter of his mother's sister. The reason for this taboo is obvious. Children of sisters are brought up in the same house and are believed to be of the same blood ; but maternal uncle's children are brought up in a different house and are treated as not belonging to the same blood.*

The Nayar social system has definite advantages over the patriarchal system. Husbands and wives not living together in the same house, Nayar marriages are happily free from the interminable quarrelling between husbands and wives which has become the joke

* For a fuller description of Nayar Society refer to the author's *Women & Marriage in India* (Allen & Unwin).

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of the modern world. A Nayar woman is never reduced to the pitiable position of her sister in the patriarchate who has to make a living by her sex. The Nayar lady has always held her head high, and her self-respect and sense of economic freedom has been the wonder of all travellers who had happened to visit Malabar. It must, however, be admitted that that tortuous, inseparable relation between sex and economics has been a thorn in the side of the Nayar social system too. Women, the affairs of whose families have fallen into a bad way, often develop a tendency to exploit their husbands especially if they happen to be wealthy, and this tendency has led to quarrels and often to litigation.

Anyway, the system has worked well in village communities, among whom it is easy for a man to live in his own house and visit his wife at night. But modern conditions have brought about considerable difficulties in working out the system. A Nayar gentleman working at Delhi or Bombay will obviously experience difficulty if his wife, partial to the old law, decides to stay in her village in Malabar and expects him to visit her every night ! Further, surrounded on all sides by powerful patriarchates, the Nayars are beginning to realize the hopelessness of their situation and are slowly succumbing to the patriarchal way of life.

The ethnology of the Nayars is as interesting as their sociology. They claim to be Kshatriyas by caste, but the Brahmins consider them to be Sudras. The Brahmins have no scruples, however, in serving well-to-do Nayars even as cooks, but they still hold the view that the Nayars are Sudras. The fact that the Nayars do not wear the sacred thread, the symbol of the twice-born, lends some support to the Brahmin view. But the Nayars have an explanation for this. When the Brahmin warrior Parasurama invaded Malabar in his famous campaign against the Kshatriyas, the Nayars are said to have accepted his supremacy and agreed to live in dependence on the Brahmins. But Parasurama was on oath to kill all Kshatriyas and he would not spare them. In this predicament the Nayars are said to have agreed to abandon the sacred thread.

Sacred thread or no sacred thread, the Brahmins of Malabar have all along accorded the Nayars a very high status, the status in fact enjoyed by Kshatriyas in other parts of India. The Nambudiri Brahmins of Malabar usually marry Nayar women according to Nayar rites.

It is interesting to note that the *Mahabharata* mentions a peculiar people of the South ruled by king Nila (blue-black). Prince Sahadeva wandered into their kingdom and found the women exceptionally good looking and enjoying almost unhindered freedom in moral matters. It is probable that the reference is to the Nayars.

In concluding this chapter on mother-right, I may mention that woman has always exercised a fascination for the Hindu. In spite of all that the medieval sages have said about her unreliable nature, in spite of all the adverse laws promulgated against her, woman has all along remained an enigma worthy of reverence and attention. Her good name is the good name of the clan and her fall is the fall of the clan. An erring man brings trouble upon himself, but an erring woman upon herself, her relatives and her clan. A man may marry below his caste, but a woman cannot demean herself in this manner. The defilement of the woman is the defilement of the race.

But alas! her very greatness was the cause of her fall. So precious a possession had to be constantly guarded lest the race should be contaminated through the defilement of women. Hence those elaborate precautions and warnings of medieval sages against letting women go astray.

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Chapter Two

MARRIAGE IN VEDIC TIMES

The Rig Vedic Aryans were a semi-pastoral people who lived an active outdoor life, and in their zest for life loved free, healthy, beautiful women who could be of help to them in the farm, in the camp and even in the battle field. They were a hardy warlike race with a simple religion and a sound love for the healthy pleasures of life. Those metaphysical speculations which later led to the degeneration of the Hindus into a stay-at-home dreamy people of ascetic leanings had not yet developed. The prayer of the Vedic Aryan was for long life and hardy sons. His main occupation was agriculture or war with hostile tribes who resisted the Aryan expansion. For such an active people, women were useful assistants and partners in daily life and not mere ornaments or articles of pleasure.

Child marriage was not prevalent in Vedic times, not at any rate in the early period. All accounts show that the married girl was a youthful maiden and that the consummation of marriage took place on the fourth night of the ceremony.

Widow-burning was unknown. In Vedic times, the dead were buried and not cremated. There are, however, traces in the *Vedas* of an ancient rite which indicates that kings and chieftains used to have their wives and cattle buried with them. The practice was abolished but its memories lingered among Indo-Aryans of the Vedic period ; the widow was taken to the grave of her husband and on his burial was thus addressed by his brother who grasped the hand of the wailing woman and raised her from the ground :

"Go up, O woman, to the world of the living ; thou liest by this one who is deceased. Come ! to him who grasps thy hand, thy second spouse, with whom thou hast now entered into relations of wife to husband."

From this passage it would appear that the widow by right went to the husband's brother. The Hindu custom of Niyoga of which we shall speak in a later chapter also supports this view. Sati was definitely a later invention.

Monogamy was probably the rule in Vedic times, though chieftains with many possessions and sages of vast learning often had a plurality of wives. The plight of the several wives of one man was not always enviable. In this respect, the world has not changed for the last three thousand years. For in the *Rig Veda* we come across the pitiful wail of the discarded wife, just as in the harems of modern polygynists. The *Vedas* have many spells and incantations for the benefit of a jealous wife who wished to destroy her rival or retain her husband's affection. Polyandry is mentioned in Vedic literature but was not widely practised.

Women of Rig Vedic times lived an active life and shared with their husbands the labours of the cornfield, and the hazards of camp life. "Mugdalini or Indrasena, wife of the sage Mugdala, helped her husband in the pursuit of robbers who had stolen their cows, drove the car for her husband when he was put in a tight corner, and taking up her husband's bow and arrows, gave them battle, defeated them and recovered the stolen property."*

There were women of learning too. A large number of the hymns of the *Rig Veda* were composed by lady Rishis. Lopamudra, Mamata, Apala, Surya and Visvavara are some of the names connected with the authorship of hymns.

Vedic literature shows that the family in those far off days was constituted more or less on the same lines as the present joint family of the Hindus. Things change very

* *Rig Vedic Culture*, Abinas Chandra Das.

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FEMININE FASHIONS

Hair styles and jewellery in ancient and medieval India

7 A NOBLE WOMAN

8 A LADY OF DISTINCTION

9 A MAID SERVANT

10 A FEMALE ATTENDANT

From sculptures, Mathura : Kushan period, 2nd Century A. D.

पुस्तकालय
गुरुकुल काँगड़ी

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FEMININE FASHIONS

Hair styles and jewellery in ancient and medieval India

11 A QUEEN

12 A GIRL OF NOBLE BIRTH

13 AN ATTENDANT

14 A PRINCESS

From Ajanta paintings : 2nd-6th Century A. D.

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

FEMININE FASHIONS

Hair styles and jewellery in ancient and medieval India

15 A WOMAN OF NO DISTINCTION

16 A MAID SERVANT

From Ajanta paintings : 2nd—6th Century A. D.

17 A NOBLE WOMAN

From sculpture, Barhut : 2nd Century B. C.

18 SOUTHERN STYLE

Penakonda, Madras : 9th Century A. D.

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FEMININE FASHIONS

Hair styles and jewellery in ancient and medieval India

19 A ROYAL TYPE
From sculpture, Gwalior : 9th Century A. D.

20 A MODEST TYPE
From sculpture, Gwalior : 6th Century A. D.

DIVINE TYPES

21 HEAD OF PARVATI
From sculpture, Abhinichata, U. P. : 6th Century A. D.

22 HEAD OF PARVATI
From sculpture, Badami : 5th Century A. D.

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slowly in India, and many of the Vedic practices still obtain. The father was the head of the family and his authority was supreme. It appears he had even complete right of sale of the younger members of the household. The mother-in-law, of course, exercised considerable influence in the Vedic family though probably less than in the present-day joint family.

As child marriages were not prevalent, young men and women had many opportunities for moving about, and love matches were common, though not general. Fairs, places of worship and festivities, the bathing ghats, etc., afforded chances to the love-sick to meet and exchange glances, if not ideas by word of mouth. Though marriages were arranged by parents as at present, the parties concerned had probably some say in the matter.

Though variations were common, marriage in Vedic period was sacramental. Since the ceremony established in this period is still performed as the orthodox form, it is worth while describing it in some detail especially as it throws much light on the status, dignity and age of the bride.

The marriage ceremony now, as of old, is performed in the house of the bride, the bridegroom and his party coming to her house for the purpose. Usually a temporary hall is constructed for the performance of the ceremony and the accommodation of guests. The chief witness is Agni, the fire-god of purity and truth ; a sacrificial fire is lit and the ceremony is performed in presence of burning flames ; the guests and the relatives of the bride and bridegroom serve as minor witnesses.

The first step towards the ceremony is the Sankalpa by the bridegroom. The Sankalpa is 'an avowal of determination to direct one's energies in such a way as will secure the attainment of the object in view'. He recites the verse : 'This woman I will now marry to acquire the wealth of Dharma (religious merit) and Praja (progeny).'

After having thus prepared himself for the solemn ceremony and its far-reaching consequences, the bridegroom addresses the bride :

"Look upon me with no angry eye ; be not hostile to me ; be tender to animals, be amiable, be glorious ; be the mother of males ; be devoted to the gods ; be the bestower of happiness ; be the bringer of prosperity to our bipeds and quadrupeds."

The bride thus propitiated, her father extracts a promise from the bridegroom before surrendering his rights over his daughter.

Says he : "In the attainment of Dharma, Artha and Kama, she is not to be transgressed."

The bridegroom responds : "Transgress her I will not."

This solemn promise is extracted thrice. This is an indication that the Vedic wife was not a mere chattel of her husband, but his mistress, at least in theory, a view confirmed by other items of the marriage ceremony too.

The girl is now given away by her father to the bridegroom. This relinquishing of parental authority over the little darling, brought up among her parents, brothers and sisters, to be taken away for good to another household, is an occasion for much sorrow. At this phase of the ceremony, the girl's mother and sisters usually weep and loud wailings are heard from the inner apartments of the household. The bridegroom hearing the mournful lament asks :

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"Why weep they when they ought to rejoice? Let them think of the attachment that will subsist between us through long years to come. They have brought about this marriage so that it may end in our embrace."

These are the preliminaries to the ceremony. The ceremony proper now commences by the placing on the girl's neck a yoke, indicating her husband's authority over her and a gold coin on the yoke for luck. The Kankana-bandhana or bangle tying ceremony is now performed with the repetition of appropriate texts.

The bridegroom then speaks: "First Soma had thee for bride; Gandharva obtained thee next; Agni was thy third husband; thy fourth husband is myself, born of man. Soma gave thee to the Gandharva, the Gandharva gave thee to Agni, and Agni has given thee to me for wealth and sons."*

This verse symbolizes the growth of the girl. In childhood a girl is believed to be guarded by Soma, in girlhood (*i.e.*, after the appearance of the pubic hair) by Gandharva, and after puberty till marriage by Agni. It is particularly mentioned in Vedic literature that the girl's association with these three supernatural beings does not corrupt her, and the man is enjoined to accept the girl from Agni without any show of hesitation. The verse clearly shows that at the time of marriage when a man receives his bride from Agni, she is a young woman who has reached puberty.

The next item of the ceremony is the Panigrahana or hand-taking. The bridegroom takes the hand of the bride, and the officiating priest chants long verses some of which have to be repeated by the bridegroom. After the Panigrahana comes the last and most important item of the ceremony known as Saptapadi or seven steps. The bridegroom leads the wife round the sacred fire seven times, each time repeating a text.† After the seventh round, which seals the irrevocable union, the bride is thus addressed by her husband:

"Now we have taken seven steps together; be thou my companion. Let us be companions. Let me have thy companionship. May I never part from thee nor thou from me. Let us be united; let us always take counsel together with glad hearts and mutual love. May we grow in strength and prosperity together. Now are we one in mind, deed and desires. Thou art Rik, I am Saman; I am the sky, thou art the earth; I am the semen, thou art its bearer; I am the mind, thou art speech. Follow me faithfully, that we may have wealth and children together."

After the Saptapadi and the repetition of this verse by the bridegroom, the officiating priest offers a concluding oblation to fire, ratifying the union, and adds a blessing to the bride, the bridegroom and the guests in due order. The text is as follows:

"May Pushan‡ lead thee hence, taking thee by the hand; may the Asvins§ convey thee away in their car; go to the dwelling (of thy husband), as thou art the mistress of the house; thou submissive (to thy husband) givest orders to his household. In this (thy husband's family) may affection increase with offering; be watchful of the domestic fire in the house; unite thy person with this thy husband; and both growing old together govern your household.....Let not the robbers who approach the husband and wife reach them; may he by easy roads bypass the difficulty; may enemies keep aloof..... Fortunate is this bride; approach, behold her.....Having given your congratulations, depart to your houses."

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* Soma is the god of the Soma plant, a herb that yielded an intoxicating juice which was widely used in Vedic rites; Gandharva is an obscure Vedic god who in Puranic times is spoken of as a celestial musician; Agni is the well-known fire-god, the presiding deity of the marriage ceremony.

† For texts repeated at the time of taking the seven steps please refer *Hindu Religion, Customs and Manners.*

‡ Pushan is the Vedic god of travellers. § Asvins are said to be racing gods in the *Vedas.* They are twins. In later literature they appear as the physicians of the celestials.

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After this, the priest collects his fees and the wedding garment as a gift, and the guests are treated to a feast, and this concludes the main items of the marriage ceremony of the orthodox form.

On the bride reaching the husband's or rather her new home, several minor ceremonies are performed. When the bride with the party arrives at the threshold, she is thus hailed :

"Be thou supreme among father-in-law, supreme also among brothers-in-law ; be thou supreme over sisters-in-law, supreme also over mother-in-law."

Further,

"Let this fair wife, with aspect bright,
And honied words her lord delight.
Let brothers mutual rancour shun,
And sister, sister kindly treat,
Let each the rest with accents sweet
Address, and all in heart be one."

After reaching the bridegroom's house, the newly-weds in Vedic times had to observe continence for three nights and this was something of an endurance test. The husband and wife were made to sleep on the same bed, but were not allowed to touch one another. A godling named Visvavasu Gandharva was to be witness to their continence, and a stump of Udumbara dressed in silk and coated with sandal paste representing this divinity was placed between the husband and wife, and neither was to cross this holy barrier.

On the termination of the three nights' ordeal, the couple were permitted to indulge in sexual congress on the fourth night. The nuptial bed was decorated for the occasion and Visvavasu Gandharva was ceremoniously asked to depart. Before the couple initiated themselves into the mysteries of sex, the bridegroom addressed Visvavasu thus :

"Rise up from hence, Visvavasu, we worship thee with reverence ; seek another maiden with large hips ; leave the bride to me, her husband."

The Udumbara stump which had, for three nights, stood between the couple, was then removed with becoming reverence ; the happy young man and his wife were now in a position to embrace each other. But sensuous thoughts were not to mar so holy an act. We are told that "there must be no lascivious thoughts, and the idea of animal gratification must be pushed entirely to the background. Both must consciously and deliberately *will* with all their might that progeny shall be spiritual."

Agreeable to the Hindu conception of the superior sex nature of woman, it was the bride who took the initiative in the bedroom. Before the union, she was to address her husband : "Know I what thou hast in thy mind, thee that hast had thy birth in *Tapas* and enriched in *Tapas*. Here in my house, do thou enrich me with progeny and wealth, being born in thy son, that has a desire for sons."

The husband willingly responds : "Know I what thou hast in thy mind ; lovingly do I view thee as one seeking impregnation in thy body during the Ritu period, thee that hast had me in thy mind. A youthful woman thou art.....and be thou born in thy son, desirous as thou art for a son."

Nor was this mutual consent sufficient. A final prayer to the gods was said by the bridegroom in the following manner :

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"May the Visvadeva unite our hearts; may the Udaka Devas Vayu and Dhatr unite our hearts; may Sarasvati vouchsafe to us appropriate speech. .....O Prajapati, enter thou my body. O Tvastr, fashioner of forms, enter thou my body with Vishnu and other Devas. O Indra, come thou with thy friends, the Visvadevas, and enter thou our bodies with them to grant us our wish. Parents of a numerous progeny are we to be .....May Prajapati grant us progeny till we grow old. May Surya make us each love the other. O bride, live thou long in the house of thy husband; and enjoy thou the companionship of thy husband ever more. May we be happy in the wealth of our bipeds and quadrupeds."

After this fervent last prayer, the couple could sleep together without further ado.

It can be easily seen that Vedic marriage, even in those days, had been highly idealized, the main emphasis being on desirable progeny and the attainment of Dharma or religious merit through the proper performance of sacrifices by the couple. The essential features of the Vedic rite have come down to us in the orthodox form of the present marriage ceremony. At present, however, only the form remains, the meaning being somewhat obscure. The texts are repeated in Sanskrit by the priest, and the percentage of young men and women who know this language is negligible. Hence in the present day marriage ceremonies, even when these are performed in the orthodox fashion, the priest repeats all the texts or almost all, and the bridegroom and the bride are occasionally asked to repeat in their mother tongue verses translated from the Sanskrit by the priest on the spot. Nor could there be much meaning in performing a ceremony in the Vedic way, when the contracting parties in the marriage were mere children, as was the case till recently.

Marriage was sanctified and idealized towards the later Vedic period when the ascendency of the Brahmins and the ritualism of the *Brahmanas* began to influence Hindu ways of life. The extreme spiritual emphasis, and the complete divorce of marriage from carnal desires might even point to a later date, in fact the period of the Codes. The sages who instituted these ordinances probably interpolated the Vedic texts and the *Grihya Sutras** freely. The marriage ceremony as it stands at present points to progeny and the performance of the Agnihotra as its main objects. Any desire for pleasure in marriage is deprecated as unbecoming of the sacrament. The Agnihotra was a daily domestic ritual, performed by householders in ancient India and for this the companionship of the wife was necessary. The Agnihotra was performed in the presence of consecrated fire, and this fire was brought from the marriage hall by the husband and wife and perpetually maintained in the husband's home. From the importance given to the Agnihotra in the ancient texts, it would appear that a married couple lived solely for the sake of performing this holy rite.

Anyway, during the early Vedic period marriage was not so very holy. In the *Rig Veda* we read the beautiful story of king Pururavas, the progenitor of the illustrious line of kings known by his name, and his marriage with the dancer Urvasi. This marriage was something of a contract between two lovers, and there was no officiating priest to sanctify the contract. As it was not entirely divorced from carnal desires, it would be worth our while to narrate the story in some detail.

King Pururavas fell madly in love with the celestial dancer Urvasi, of most beautiful form, and begged her to be his wife. After some show of reluctance, common to all women conscious of their charms, the proud dancer consented to marry him on condition that he would never appear before her naked. If he indulged in this objectionable act, the was free to leave him. Pururavas accepted this condition and married Urvasi. They lived together happily for some time, when the Gandharvas among whom Urvasi had lived

* The *Grihya Sutras* lay down rules for domestic life and ritual.

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FEMININE FASHIONS

Hair styles and jewellery in ancient and medieval India

23 A COMMON TYPE

24 A NOBLE WOMAN

From sculptures, Bhuvanesvar, Orissa : 11th Century A. D.

25 A SERVANT GIRL

From sculpture, Raj Mahal, Bihar : 10th Century A. D

26 HEAD OF A GODDESS

From sculpture, Sunderbans, Bengal : 11th Century A. D.

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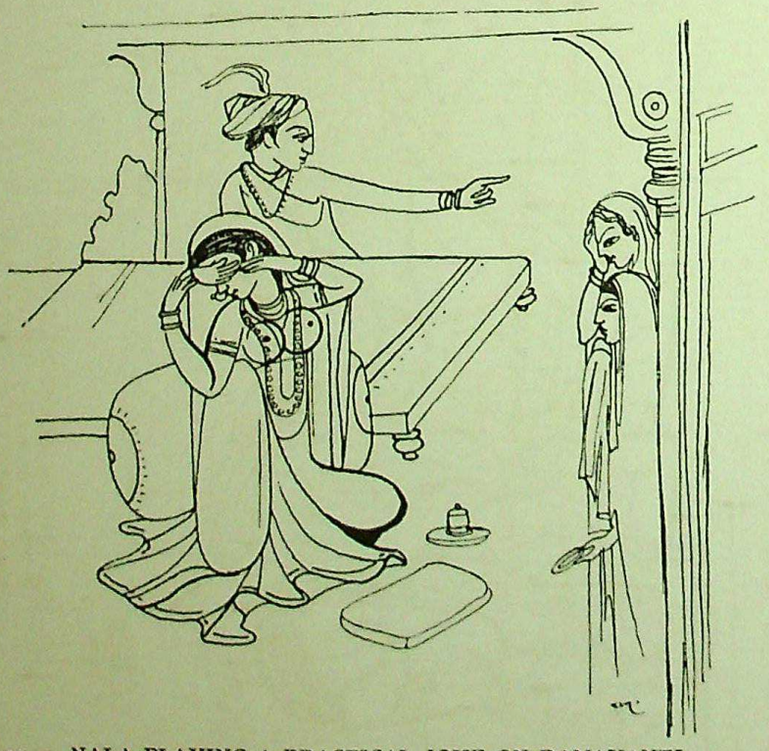
27 NALA AND DAMAYANTI LEAVING THEIR KINGDOM
A scene from the beautiful Indian love story of Nala and Damayanti
Pahari painting : 18th Century A. D.

28 NALA PERSUADING DAMAYANTI
A scene from *Nala Damayanti*
Pahari painting : 18th Century A. D.



29 NALA PLAYING A PRACTICAL JOKE ON DAMAYANTI
The maids are warned not to divulge his identity

30 DAMAYANTI IN A DIFFIDENT MOOD

Scenes From *Nala Damayanti*
Pahari painting: 18th Century A. D.

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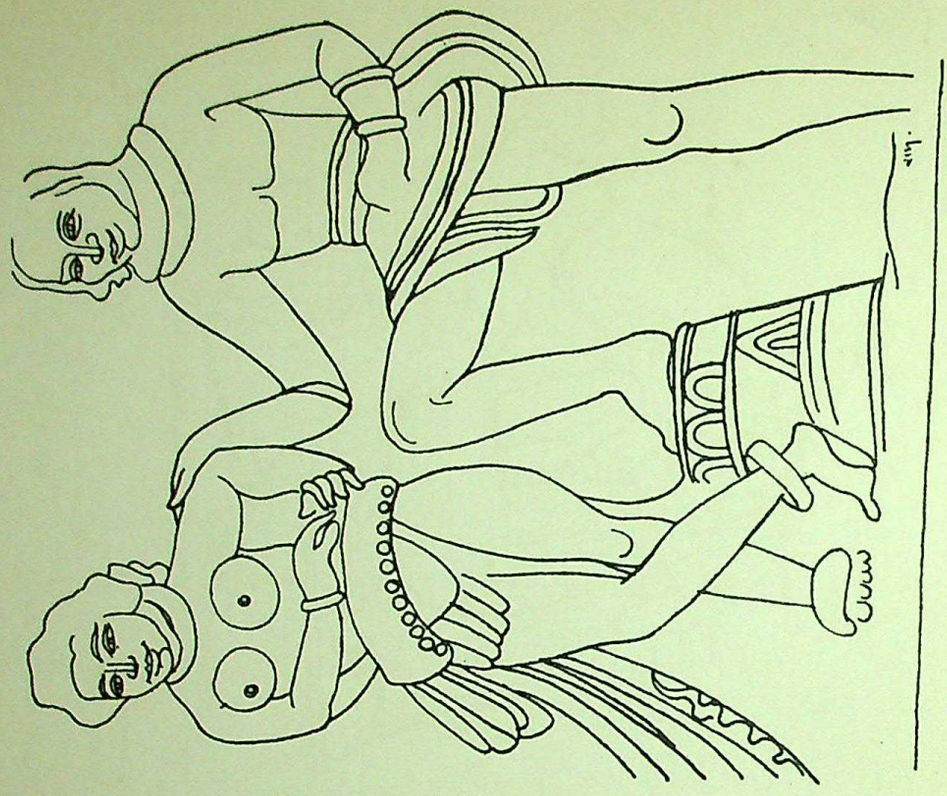

32 THE KUSHAN STYLE
From sculpture, Mathura : 2nd Century A. D.

31 EASTERN STYLE
From sculpture, Bodhgaya Temple : 2nd Century A. D.

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prior to her marriage missed her and wished to bring her back to them. They came to know of the contract between Pururavas and Urvasi and decided to make the king appear naked before his wife.

Urvasi was very fond of two lambs which she always tied to the bedstead together with the ewe when she went to sleep. One night when the king was sleeping with his wife, the Gandharvas stole the lambs and Urvasi woke up and cried :

"Alas ! They are taking away my darlings, as if I were where there is no hero and no man."

Upon this, Pururavas thought within himself : "How can that be a place without a hero and without a man where I am ?"

And naked as he was, he sprang up from his bed. The Gandharvas now produced a flash of lightning, and Urvasi beheld her husband even as by daylight.

Urvasi now left the king and went back to the Gandharvas. Pururavas, maddened by love of his darling, wandered all over Kurukshetra. After much vain search, he at last found Urvasi in a lotus lake bathing with a number of nymphs. She recognized him, and the mad lover addressed her thus in agony : "O my wife, stay thou, cruel in mind. Stop, pray, let us speak together !"

Urvasi replied : "What concern have I with speaking to thee ? I have passed away like the first of the dawns. Pururavas, go home ; I am like the wind difficult to catch.... Thou didst not do what I had told thee ; hard to catch am I for thee, go to thy home again."

Said Pururavas : "Then will I rush away this day, never to come back, to go to the farthest distance ; I will lie in Nirriti's* lap, fierce wolves will devour me—Nay, your friend will hang himself or rush forth ; or the wolves or dogs will devour him."

Urvasi said : "Pururavas ! Do not die. Do not rush away ! Let not the cruel beasts devour thee ! Truly there is no friendship with women and theirs are the hearts of hyenas†.....Do not take this to heart ! There is no friendship with women. Return home.....When, changed in form, I walked among mortals and passed the nights there during four autumns, I ate a little ghee once a day and even now I feel satisfied therewith !"

In Urvasi's words we do not find 'the heart of a hyena' but tenderness not unmixed with love and pity. In spite of all her persuasions, Pururavas refused to leave her, and Urvasi was so moved by his love that she confided to him a plan by which he could be converted into a Gandharva and live with her.

Such love marriages were confined to the earlier Vedic period ; later, marriage became strictly sacramental. The rigour of the patriarchal code had its natural consequences. Women were found not equal to the ideal preached by the pious. Adultery was not uncommon, and birth of illegitimate babies and their exposure are mentioned in Vedic literature. Women soon became too much of a responsibility and a trouble for the parents, and the birth of daughters came to be looked upon as a misfortune. Hence in some Vedic texts we come across fervent prayers by parents to give them sons and to 'give daughters elsewhere'.

We will have occasion to speak of this attitude towards women later, but for the present we will confine ourselves to the general spirit of love and esteem for women discernible in early Vedic literature. The bard who sang the following hymn to Ushas,

* Nirriti is an evil spirit.

† This sentence, in obvious conflict with the spirit of the story, is believed to be a later interpolation.

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the virgin goddess of the dawn, certainly had an adequate conception of the charm, grace and dignity of woman :

"Hail, Ushas, Daughter of the Sky,
Who, borne upon thy shining car,
By ruddy steeds from realms afar,
And ever lightening, drawest nigh :
Thou sweetly smilest, goddess fair,
Disclosing all thy youthful grace,
Thy bosom bright, thy radiant face,
And lustre of thy golden hair :—

(So shines a fond and winning bride,
Who robes her form in brilliant guise,
And to her lord's admiring eyes,
Displays her charms with conscious pride.
Or virgin by her mother decked,
Who glorying in her beauty, shows
In every glance, her power she knows
All eyes to fix, all hearts subject :—

Or actress, who by skill in song
And dance and graceful gestures light,
And many coloured vestures bright,
Enchants the eager, grazing throng :—

Or maid who, wont her limbs to lave
In some cool stream among the woods,
Where never vulgar eye intrudes
Emerges fairer from the wave) :—

But closely by the amorous sun
Pursued and vanquished in the race,
Thou soon art locked in his embrace,
And with him blendest into one."*

* *Rig Veda*, Tr.: J. Muir.

Chapter Three

WOMEN AND MARRIAGE IN THE EPIC PERIOD

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are the two great epic poems of the Hindus. Of the two, the *Mahabharata* is the greater and more voluminous and it represents Hinduism in all its diversity; further, it deals with an epoch in which the Indo-Aryan culture had reached the zenith of its glory.

The main incidents narrated in the *Mahabharata* took place in the Indo-Gangetic plain. The capital of the heroes of the epic was situated near modern Delhi, and the great battle was fought in the plains of Kurukshetra, a name the place still retains. Practically the whole of northern India was ruled by kings of Aryan origin or by those accepted into the Aryan fold, and the influence of the Indo-Aryans extended beyond the Vindhyas to the southern extremity of the peninsula. The Aryans were the undisputed masters of the country at the time, and other races lived in dependence upon them.

Like Hinduism itself the *Mahabharata* is something of a growth rather than the work of a single person. The theme of the original work was the wickedness of the five princes (the Pandavas) against their righteous cousins, the Kauravas. The work was later re-written by the partisans of the Pandavas who reversed the plot completely and painted the Kauravas as the villains and the Pandavas as persecuted heroes. The re-writing was probably done by Brahmins after the overthrow of the Kshatriyas as they wished to give a new garb to an ancient story which had attained much popularity at the time. The history of Brahminism affords several examples of interpolations and alterations of originals of this nature.

The re-written work was not, however, left alone for long. Hindu writers have shown a genius for interpolation and for passing on their views as those of some sage of antiquity, and the *Mahabharata* has suffered much at the hands of these writers. The loose, voluminous, almost interminable work as it stands at present is a veritable literary forest in which one easily loses one's way. In this extraordinary epic poem are found beautiful moral precepts together with descriptions of barbarous customs, lovely tales along with dull, tiresome, meandering discourses on abstruse subjects, truly scientific treatises on war, statecraft and philosophy interspersed with spells and formulæ for black magic, fairy tales and idiotic theories on the origin of things. Some chapters of the work are exceptionally beautiful while others try the patience of the most devoted reader whom a promise of heaven alone would induce to wade through.

Beneath all this perplexing maze runs, however, an undercurrent of the Kshatriya spirit—the zest for life; the spirit, in fact, of the original work which no amount of interpolation and re-writing by ascetics could subdue.

Hinduism, as already mentioned, is a conglomeration of cultures, some originally foreign or even opposed to the Aryan ideals of the Vedic period, and the *Mahabharata* is an epitome of the cultural heritage of the Hindus. The work contains the moral precepts, practices, customs and traditions of various groups, racially and culturally different from one another, and hence we will seek in vain in the *Mahabharata* for a common standard of morality applicable to the whole community known by the comprehensive term 'Hindus'. From the *Mahabharata* can be adduced evidence in support of lascivious and promiscuous practices of savages as well as for strict ascetic morality. We often find in the epic the most villainous god or man quoting high authority for seducing virtuous maidens and winning his point. On the other hand some of the characters are so scrupulous in moral matters that all the books of sacred law and the long sermons of omniscient sages fail to convince them of the sinlessness of any particular course of action in a given situation.

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Anyway, the teachings of the epic are generally in conformity with the moral precepts of the *Grihya Sutras* (domestic rules of conduct) of the post-Vedic period and in certain respects even of the law-giver Manu. The eight forms of marriage mentioned as valid in the *Grihya Sutras* and the code of Manu are accepted in the epic too. The marriage ceremony preferred in the epic times was probably the Vedic type. But with the development of the caste system, the Vedic form of marriage became more important among the Brahmins than among the other castes. The hardy Kshatriyas with their mundane leanings found the sacramental Brahmin rite too tame and spiritual for their warlike nature. The form of marriage that appealed most to the Kshatriya spirit was the Swayamvara—self-choice. This form of marriage gave ample opportunities for kings to give a display of their splendour. The Aryans of the epic period were not the nomads of the Vedic times with their simple ways of life. Cities had risen in the Indo-Gangetic plain, and powerful monarchs commanding legions of men held sway over vast territories. These monarchs did not care much for the simple Vedic ritual, good enough for camp-dwellers or agriculturists ; hence their predilection for the pageant of Swayamvara. It is interesting to note that the code of Manu, the most authoritative law book of the Hindus, does not include Swayamvara in its list of recognized forms of marriage.

The most important feature of Swayamvara was the right of a maiden to choose her husband from a number of suitors. When a princess came of age to be married, her father fixed a date and sent out invitations to all persons who, he thought, had the requisite qualifications for the hand of his daughter. The distinguished guests were seated in a specially constructed hall, lavishly decorated for the occasion, and at the appointed hour appeared the princess, splendidly attired, holding a garland in her hand. With the princess came a couple of intelligent attendants, well versed in the lineage and genealogies of kings. As the princess passed each one of the royal suitors, her attendants described to her his name, titles and lineage, and the princess placed the garland on the neck of the suitor she wished to wed.

A marriage or any other important feast was usually an occasion for quarrel as the guests often considered a social function the most suitable for settling a dispute. The presence of a large number of people was an incentive to complaint because of the publicity value. The great warriors of the epic period were no exceptions to this rule. The Swayamvara in ancient India often broke up in a free fight. The rejected suitors usually maintained that the choice of the princess was ill-advised, and gave expression to their feelings in a very violent manner ; moreover they were in a frame of mind to show to the princess by their skill in arms what great husbands she had lost through her folly. The host, however, was well prepared for such an eventuality and because of the vast armies he had ready for the occasion did not experience much difficulty in driving away his turbulant guests.

A famous Swayamvara described in the *Mahabharata* is that of Damayanti, princess of Vidarbha. Damayanti is not a main character in the epic, but the heroine of a story narrated to the heroes of the epic by a sage who knew the lore of the Indo-Aryans. Damayanti loved Nala, king of Nishadha, so goes the story, and this king reiterated her love. The lovers had not seen each other, but knew from reliable sources enough about each other to inflame love. Bhima, Damayanti's father, declared the date of her Swayamvara and sent special invitations to all the kings of India to attend the wedding, so that his daughter could have a wide choice. Nala, to be sure, was one of the specially invited guests. But even uninvited people were welcome on the occasion and the celestials, Indra, Yama, Varuna and Agni, the four guardians of the universe, on coming to know of Damayanti's beauty and accomplishments, decided to attend the Swayamvara. The gods on their way to Vidarbha happened to meet Nala and learnt from him that he too was going

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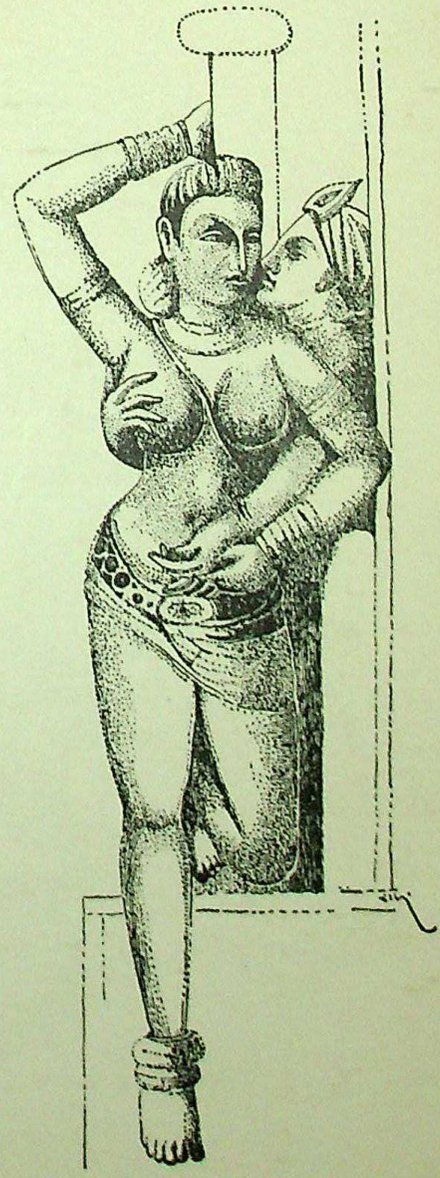
33 LATA VESHTIKA EMBRACE
From Mathura : 2nd Century A. D.



34 EMBRACE
From sculpture, Amraoti : 2nd Century A. D.

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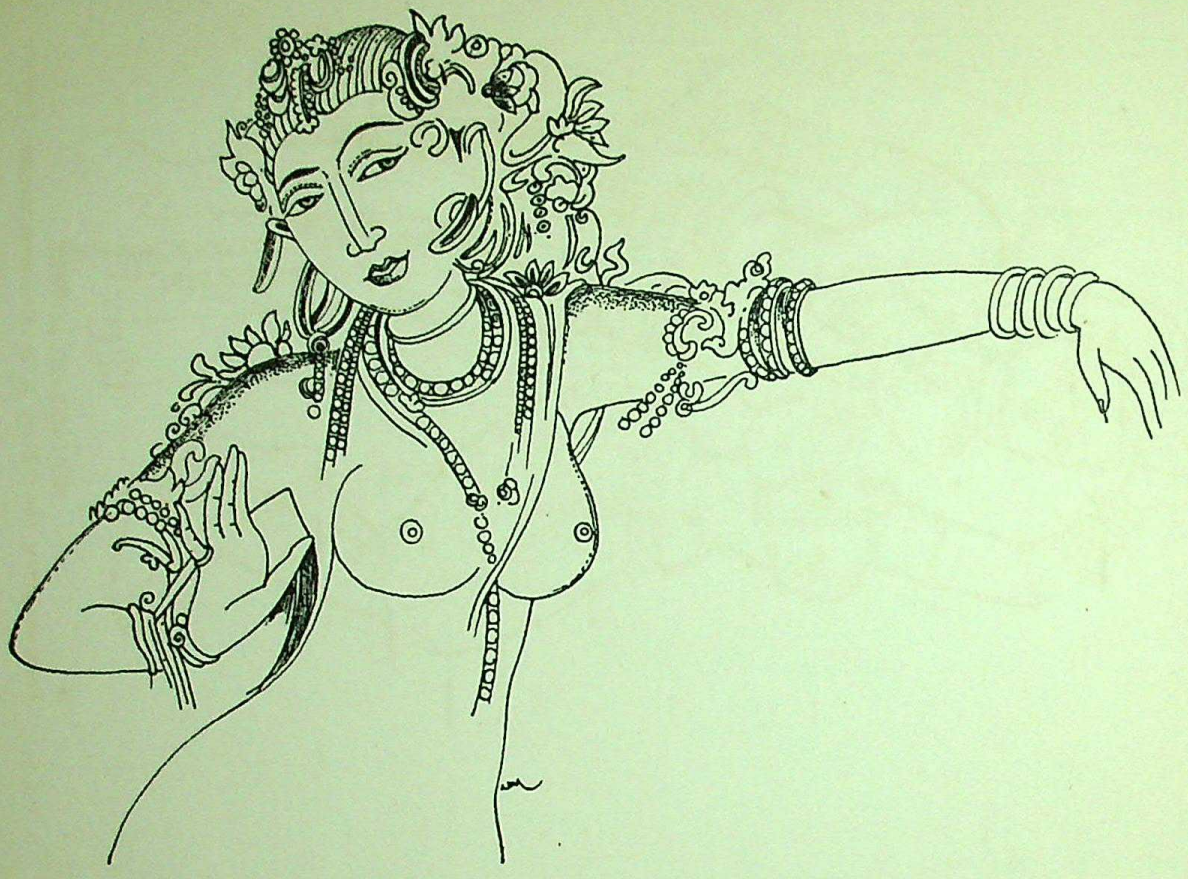

35 AN APSARA OR CELESTIAL COURTESAN
From sculpture, Bagh Cave : 7th Century A. D.

36 TOILET
Drawn after finds at Begram : 2nd Century A. D.

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37 DECCANI LOVERS
From sculpture, Ellora : 8th Century A. D.

38 HINDUSTANI LOVERS
From sculpture, 2nd Century A. D., *Provincial Museum, Lucknow*

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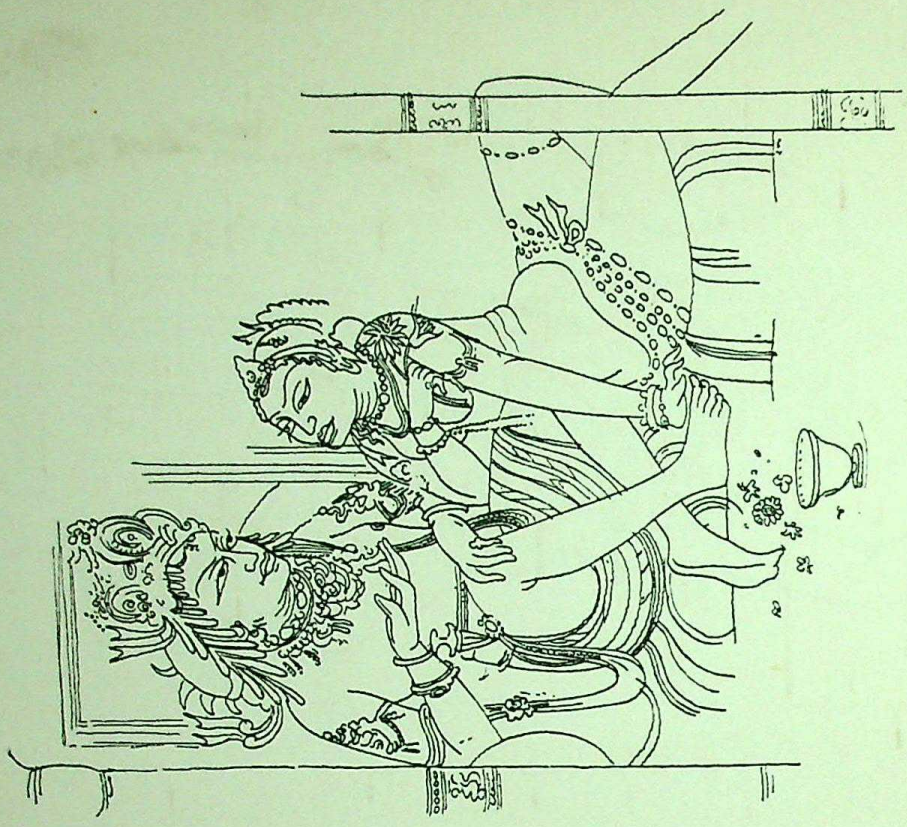
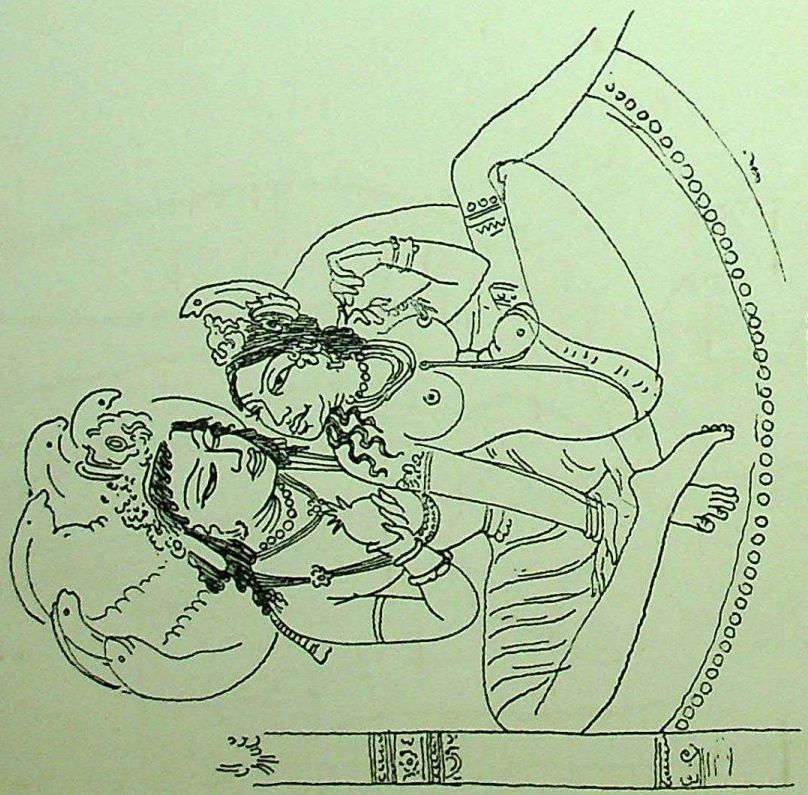


40 A PRINCE AND HIS CONSORT



39 ROYAL LOVERS

From Ajanta paintings : 2nd—6th Century A. D.

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as a suitor for the Swayamvara. The personality of Nala so impressed the celestials that they thought the princess was likely to prefer him to them. The jealous gods then cunningly worked on the prince and made him promise to do an errand for them. Upon this they asked him to go as a messenger to Damayanti and plead their cause.

Nala, to save his honour, went on his awkward mission and pleaded with the princess on behalf of the gods. He was in disguise but the princess recognized him ; she put him on oath and asked him to disclose his identity which the prince did after considerable show of reluctance. He was even forced to tell her the strange circumstances that made him perform the duty of a messenger for the gods. The princess pleasantly chid her lover for getting himself involved in such a situation and asked him to attend the Swayamvara.

Nala faithfully reported to the gods all that had happened. The gods fearing the worst, decided to frustrate the plans of the princess if she were in a mood to wed Nala in preference to them. Hence all of them assumed the form of Nala and sat near this prince in the Swayamvara hall. As a result, when Damayanti came into the hall she was at a loss whom to wed and even her omniscient attendant was unable to guide her. In this predicament the princess addressed a prayer to the gods themselves, put them on their honour and asked them to show her a way to distinguish Nala from them. On this, the helpless gods floated into mid-air and Damayanti placed the garland on the neck of Nala. The gods themselves, we are told, were so struck by the suitability of the match that they departed blessing the couple.

The Swayamvara of Draupadi, the heroine of the *Mahabharata*, was not, however, so happy. In Draupadi's case, the principle involved was not love alone. Draupadi could not wed any one she loved among the assembled guests, but only an archer with the requisite skill in wielding a divine bow. She was, more or less, offered as a prize in an archery contest.

To appreciate the full implications of the situation, the story of Draupadi's Swayamvara has to be narrated in some detail.

Drupada, king of the Panchala country, wished to give his lovely daughter Draupadi in marriage to Arjuna, one of the five Pandava princes. Arjuna was a renowed archer and it was his deadly marksmanship that won for him Drupada's admiration. But before the princess came of age to be married, the evil Duryodhana, enemy of the Pandavas, contrived to burn down the house in which the five princess lived, and they were reported as burnt alive.

Drupada came to hear of this tragedy and was much distressed to lose Arjuna whom he had designed to make his son-in-law. He however decided to bestow his daughter on as skilful a marksman as Arjuna. When Draupadi came of age to be married, he fixed the date for the Swayamvara and sent invitations to all the powerful monarchs of the time to attend it. An arena was constructed for the reception of the guests and in the centre of the arena was fixed a high pole with a revolving ring on top. The successful candidate for Draupadi's hand had to shoot five arrows in quick succession through the ring. A mighty bow was kept in the arena for the use of the suitors. Not only specially invited guests but any one "having birth, beauty and strength of person could compete for the princess's hand." In fact, the man who won the princess was an uninvited mendicant Brahmin.

The bride, however, had some say in the matter, and could refuse to wed a person with no birth, beauty and strength of person. The deadly hatred of the great archer Karna for Draupadi started in the Swayamvara hall. Karna was equal if not superior to Arjuna in marksmanship, and he had come as a suitor together with his friend Duryodhana, the

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arch-enemy of the Pandavas. Karna was the son of Surya, the sun-god, but his divine origin had been kept a secret and he was publicly known as the son of a charioteer who had brought him up. By his own achievements he became king of Anga. When this famous soldier and marksman entered the arena and, taking the bow with ease, tested the string with admirable grace, every one knew that he was sure to win the princess. But Draupadi interrupted him. "Let him not shoot," said she, "I will not wed the son of a charioteer."

Thus openly humiliated, Karna threw down the bow and returned to his seat. But he remained the most relentless enemy of Draupadi and her five husbands. Even when she was denuded in public, years later, the usually noble-minded and chivalrous Karna could only say that, being the common wife of five men, she was not to be treated with the courtesy due to her sex but as a shameless woman who lived outside the pale of ordinary morality.

After all the Kshatriyas had failed to shoot the arrows into the revolving ring, the prize for the archery contest was well nigh being declared unclaimed, when a Brahmin youth rose from the crowd of spectators and entered the arena. This was the Pandava prince Arjuna. He had not perished in the flames as reported but had escaped with his brothers and mother into a forest. After many adventures they settled down in an obscure village, and were living in the guise of Brahmins when they heard of Draupadi's Swayamvara. They went to the feast, as Brahmins were always welcome on such occasions. When Arjuna found that none of the Kshatriyas could claim the princess, his royal blood rose in his veins. He leapt into the arena, and taking the bow and arrows, shot, to the dismay of all, five arrows in quick succession into the revolving ring. The identity of Arjuna was not revealed just then, but Draupadi accepted him as her husband.

The usual free fight followed. Karna especially had a legitimate grievance since he was not allowed to shoot the arrows and he decided to avenge his humiliation by an appeal to arms. Duryodhana supported him. The fact that the bridegroom was supposed to be a Brahmin was also an incentive to the Kshatriyas to fight and most of them sided with Karna and fought Drupada and his son Dhrishtadyumma. But these warriors aided by their own picked men and the five Pandavas defeated the turbulent guests and drove them out of the city.

A peculiar form of Swayamvara was the wedding of Savitri mentioned in the *Mahabharata*. This princess was so full of splendour that no one dared to ask for her hand, and she remained unmarried for a long time after she had attained puberty. Her father did not, however, arrange a Swayamvara in the conventional manner but sent her with a royal escort to visit neighbouring kingdoms and select a husband for herself. The princess wandered into many lands but found no young man to her liking. At last she came to a forest and in a colony of hermits found the young Satyavan and fell in love with him. There was no immediate marriage, but Savitri came back to her father and intimated to him her desire to wed Satyavan, upon which the marriage was arranged.

This romantic story stands alone in Hindu sacred literature. This tale of a respectable maiden of royal blood leaving her father's house in search of a husband is unique in Hindu legend, and has not been copied either in literature or in practice.

The conventional Swayamvara, on the other hand, is a historical institution. With the decay of the Kshatriyas and the ascendancy of the Brahmins, the institution was given up in the medieval period but was revived by the Rajputs who claimed to be the lineal descendants of the epic heroes. The last recorded Swayamvara was of the princess Samyogita, daughter of Jaichand of Kanauj. Samyogita secretly loved Prithviraj Chawhan, king of Delhi, but he was an enemy of Jaichand and hence was not invited to the Swayamvara.

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The Chawhan prince who loved Samyogita made a secret raid on the Swayamvara hall and carried away the bride, which resulted in a vain chase and much fighting.

And this brings us to marriage by capture. The capture of a bride especially from the Swayamvara hall in the manner described above, was considered in epic times as highly becoming a bold Kshatriya. An incident of this nature is narrated in the *Mahabharata* which throws much light on the institution of marriage by capture among the Indo-Aryans. The fact that the brides were captured by the revered Bhishma himself, the most morally scrupulous of the heroes of the epic, makes it all the more interesting.

The king of Benares had three daughters Amba, Ambika and Ambalika who were to be married on the same day. Bhishma's half-brother Vichitravirya was an eligible young prince, and Bhishma, as his guardian, had the responsibility of finding wives for him. On coming to hear of the beauty and accomplishments of the daughters of the king of Benares, Bhishma decided to capture them for Vichitravirya. Accordingly, with a party of chosen men he appeared in Benares at the time of the Swayamvara, captured the three princesses and made them mount his swift-moving chariot. The king of the Salvas who was secretly betrothed to Amba, chased the captor and engaged him in action, but was defeated by Bhishma and put to flight.

On the three princesses being taken to Hastinapura, Bhishma's capital, Amba told Bhishma that she would not wed Vichitravirya as she loved the Salva prince. The other two princesses willingly married Vichitravirya.

The capture of Amba, however, gave rise to many difficulties. Although Bhishma was within the law in capturing Amba, he could not force a marriage on her against her will. So he allowed her to go back to the king of the Salvas. When Amba, with exceeding joy, returned to her lover, she was surprised to find the Salva king in no mood to accept her. He told her definitely that he would have nothing to do with a woman who was captured by another and taken to his palace. Neither her protestations of innocence nor her pleadings were of any avail, and Amba was turned out of the kingdom of the Salvas. Thus abandoned, Amba would not go back to her parents for shame, and repaired to a forest where she took counsel with the holy sages who were inhabiting the place and wished to know of them who was really responsible for her miserable plight. After much deliberation and arguments, the sages came to the conclusion that Bhishma was to blame in the case, since he had no business to capture a maiden from her father's house without first ascertaining her intentions.

Amba avenged her wrong and brought about the destruction of Bhishma, but this story belongs to another chapter and will be narrated later. The moral of the tale of Amba's capture is that though capture was permissible for Kshatriyas, the willingness of the lady to marry the captor or his ward had to be previously obtained to give it full moral authority. This is amply proved by other stories of a similar nature narrated in the epic. Most of the captures mentioned in the *Mahabharata* were contrived through the connivance of the fair victim, the necessity for capture arising out of the stubbornness of parents or guardians who wished to give the maiden in marriage to a person of their choice whom she hated. The capture of Rukmini by Krishna is of interest in this connection. Rukmini was betrothed to Shisupala, the mortal enemy of Krishna, by her parents although she herself loved Krishna. Krishna with her full collaboration captured her from her parents' palace and married her.

Another interesting marriage by capture mentioned in the *Mahabharata* is that of the beautiful Subhadra, sister of Balarama and Krishna, by the Pandava prince Arjuna. Balarama as the elder brother was the guardian of Subhadra, and he was an ardent ally

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of the Kauravas, whereas Krishna, the younger brother, was a friend of the Pandavas in general and of Arjuna in particular. Balarama did not think much of Arjuna as a possible brother-in-law, but he had a high opinion of Duryodhana, the head of the rival camp. Arjuna was much enamoured of Subhadra, and Krishna wanted her to marry the Pandava prince; but a match between the two was difficult to arrange in the conventional way because of the objection of Balarama to Arjuna. In this predicament Krishna advised his friend to have recourse to the bold law of the Kshatriyas. Arjuna was only too glad to show his Kshatriya spirit, and while Subhadra was picnicking on a hillside with her companions he captured the fair maid and made away with her. Balarama was infuriated at the outrage and was bent upon giving hot chase to the ravisher, but the tactful Krishna soothed him by reciting quotations from holy texts. Besides, Krishna told his brother, once the business was over, there was no sense in fuming and fretting, and the best thing they could do was to reconcile themselves to an accomplished fact; a view reluctantly accepted by the fierce Balarama.

A marriage by contract, reminiscent of the Pururavas legend of the *Vedas*, is mentioned in the *Mahabharata*. Shantanu, father of Bhishma, was a great hunter and once while he was hunting game in the forest happened to meet a maiden of celestial beauty bathing in a stream. The king fell madly in love with the nymph and wished to marry her. The fay agreed to wed him provided he would raise no objection to whatever she did; if he objected, she had the right to leave him. The king was in a state of mind to agree to anything and he accepted the condition and married her.

Ganga (this was the name of the fay) lived as Shantanu's queen and bore him seven sons. But every time a son was born, the mother took the babe to the Ganges and drowned him. The king sorrowed on noticing this unnatural behaviour of his wife, but said nothing because of the contract between the two. At last when the eighth son was born and Ganga took him in her hands and proceeded towards the holy stream, the fond father objected. She immediately left him and went to her celestial abode, but the king was given the babe to look after. Thus the origin of the renowned chariot fighter Bhishma.

We have mentioned elsewhere that the behaviour and origin of most of the heroes of the *Mahabharata* were in direct contrast with the Brahminical morality preached in the epic. We shall now deal with this subject in detail.

To start with, Draupadi, the heroine of the epic, had five husbands. We have narrated the manner in which she was won by Arjuna in the archery contest. Arjuna and his four brothers returned to their mother who was then living in the village of Ekachakra, and the sons told the mother that Arjuna had that day obtained something very precious. On hearing this the good lady, not knowing the exact nature of the precious possession, told her sons to share it among all the five of them. Thus was Draupadi shared by the five Pandava princes.

This is the justification given in the epic for the polyandry of the heroine. Yudhishtira, the eldest of the five princes, was always scrupulous on points of morality and when his mother unwittingly asked her sons to share Draupadi among themselves consulted learned Brahmins on the subject. These found many precedents of polyandry in holy writ. Jatila, of Gautama's race, had seven learned Brahmins for her husbands, and Varkshi ten brothers. This quietened the qualms of conscience of Yudhishtira and he decided to share Draupadi with his four brothers.

What was probably ordinary morality at the time the original work was written had to be 'justified' in a later age, and hence these passages explaining the peculiar morality of Draupadi.

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41 OFFER OF A DRINK

42 OFFER OF A FLOWER

From Ajanta paintings : 2nd—6th Century A. D.

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43 THE KISS : CENTRAL INDIAN IDEAL
Khajuraho : 11th Century A. D.

44 LOVERS FROM THE NORTH
Avantiswara Temple, Avantipura, Kashmir : 9th Century A. D

45 A COURTESAN : THE PARROT IS THE SYMBOL OF FREE LOVE
Mathura ; 2nd Century A. D

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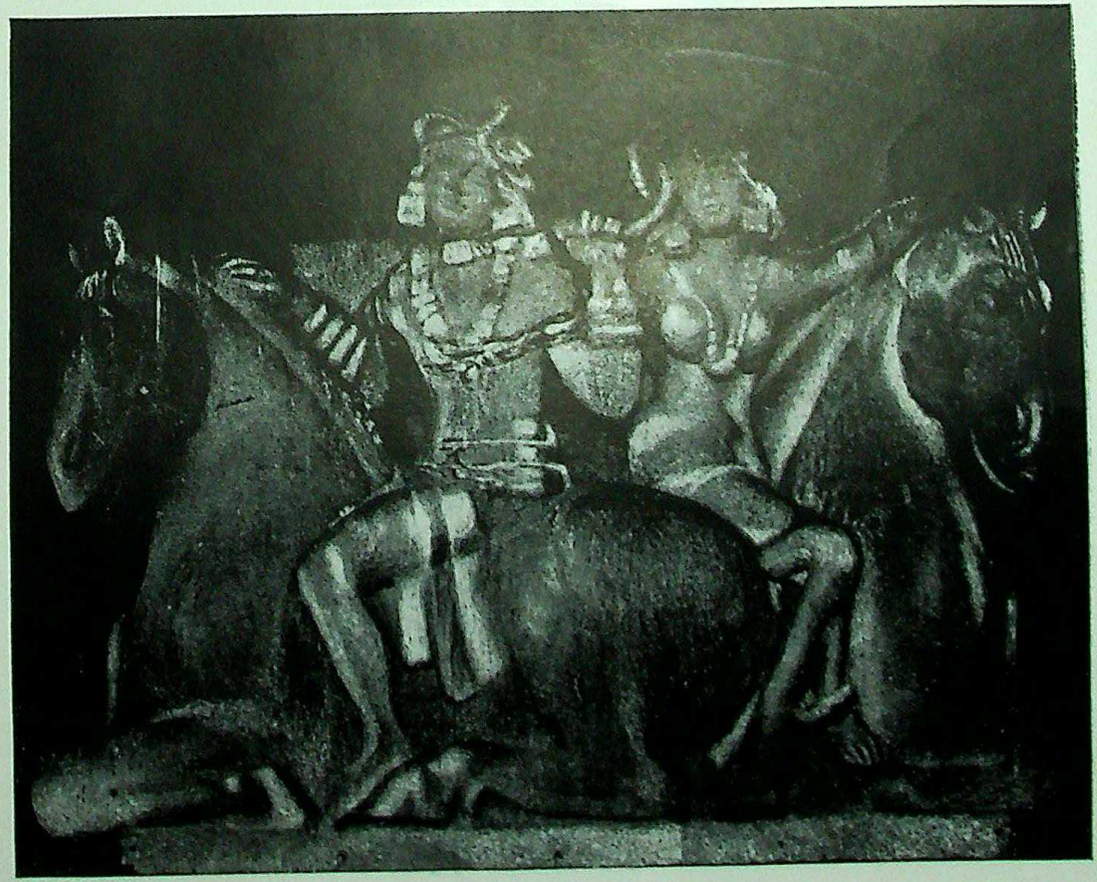
46 NAGA FIGURE
Konarak, Orissa : 13th Century A. D.
Photo : P. Braham



47 EQUESTRIAN LOVERS
Chaitya Cave, Bedsa, Poona : 2nd Century B. C.
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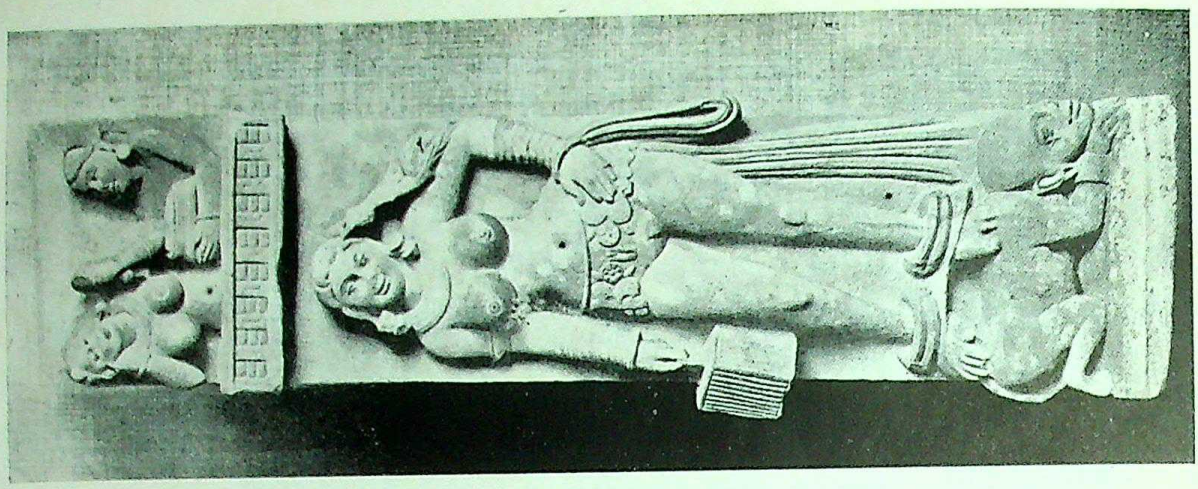

49 A KUSHAN TYPE
Mathura : 2nd Century A. D.

48 FLYING CELESTIAL COUPLE
Aihole, Bijapur : 6th Century A. D.
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In spite of the lengthy sermons of learned sages that we often read in the *Mahabharata*, the tales of the heroes and heroines of the epic show that the people of the age were happily free from many of the sex superstitions that later marred Hindu morality. The institution of Niyoga (levirate) was in full swing. When a man was incapable of raising progeny, through impotence or any other cause, the nearest of kin was permitted to have relations with his wife and beget children. When a near kin was not available, learned Brahmins were recommended for this pleasant office.

Even illegitimacy was not so heinous a sin in the epic times as it became in a later age. Though children born illegitimate were usually exposed, the woman was not excommunicated or abandoned as was done in the medieval times. She even found extremely desirable husbands. Almost all the heroes of the *Mahabharata* were born outside conventional morality and this makes us suspect that the author of the epic thought conventional morality too tame for the birth of fiery men.

We have already noticed the polyandrous morality of the five Pandava princes, the heroes of the epic. They themselves were born outside conventional morality. Kunti the venerable mother of the heroes had many "moral" adventures in her youth. She is said to have attended on a very holy Brahmin in her maidenhood and to have received a boon from the sage by which she could call any god of the patheon by repeating a spell. The maximum number of celestials she could thus bring to her service was, however, five.

After the departure of the holy man, Kunti, woman-like, wished to know whether the spell could be really effective and asked Surya, the sun-god, to appear before her. The spell worked and the splendid luminary came to the maiden and asked her why she had called him. Kunti confessed that she called him out of idle curiosity and had no particular work for him. Surya chid her for her folly, but was so enamoured of her beauty that he begged for the favour of her embrace. The virtuous maiden pointed out to the god the immoral nature of his demand, but Surya under the pressure of passion maintained the divine right of gods to break the laws of humans. Carried away by his eloquence and handsome appearance, Kunti yielded herself to his embrace, and of this union was born Karna, already noticed. The child, had, of necessity, to be exposed, and was picked up by a charioteer and brought up as his son. The boy became a skilled archer and, as already mentioned, carved out a kingdom for himself. He remained a staunch friend and ally of Duryodhana, the mortal enemy of his five half-brothers.

The birth of Karna did not, however, disqualify Kunti for marriage. She was honourably married to king Pandu, but could not have children by her husband as he had fallen under the curse of a sage. Pandu, while hunting, accidentally shot a sage who was engaged in the business of love, and the dying sage cursed that Pandu would die, even like him, in the arms of his wife. For fear of this calamity, Pandu abjured the company of his two wives and lived as a celibate. He wished to have sons anyhow, and he advised his wife Kunti to have recourse to the sanctions of Niyoga. Kunti suggested an alternative and revealed to her husband her secret power to call the gods when she wished. Pandu agreed to this and Kunti obtained three sons, Yudhishtira from Yama, Arjuna from Indra and Bhima from Marut the wind god. She could call one more god to her service, but this power she generously transferred to Madri, the second wife of Pandu. This clever lady asked the twin Asvins to favour her, and was blessed with the twins Nakula and Sahadeva.

Pandu himself and his half-brother Dhritarashatra (father of Duryodhana and other Kauravas) were born in levirate. Vichitravirya, husband of Amba and Ambalika (see page 19) died childless, and his mother Satyavati decided that the illustrious lunar line should not end with Vichitravirya. So she requisitioned the services of her first born son Vyasa

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who had taken to asceticism and lived in a wild forest. The holy man agreed to the proposal and came to the gorgeous city of Hastinapura and was introduced to the harem of his departed half-brother. The physical appearance of the sage was not, however, so attractive as his spiritual splendour and the princess Ambika, when the sage embraced her, closed her eyes, and as a result her son Dhritarashtra, born of this union, was blind from birth ; Ambalika, however, was a bolder lady and she only turned pale when the holy man approached her and her son Pandu had no congenital defect except a pale complexion.

The story of the birth of Bharata from whom India takes her Sanskrit name Bharatam, is worthy of note. Bharata was the son of Dushyanta born of Sakuntala, herself the exposed child of the dancer Menaka. Dushyanta married Sakuntala in the hermitage of her foster father Kanva according to the Gandharva rite which, strictly speaking, was no rite at all. The lovers, by mutual consent agreed to be united in matrimony, and exercised their conjugal rights straight away. There were no priests or witnesses to hallow and bless the union, and no calling upon the gods to ratify the misdeeds of men.

Although during the middle ages the Gandharva rite fell into disrepute, in epic times Gandharva morality was highly acceptable to kings and sages. We must not, however, forget the disadvantages of the Gandharva rite, especially as far as the woman is concerned, in a patriarchal community. As marriage carries with it definite economic and social responsibilities for the male in a patriarchate, it often happens that a youthful lover forgets his obligations once the thirst of love is quenched. In Shakuntala's case something like this did happen and a loyal woman, big with child, was disowned and disgraced by her husband before she was, through divine intervention, accepted.

The contempt for conventional morality so conspicuous in the *Mahabharata* will appear less surprising when we learn the orgin of its famous author Dwaipayana Vyasa, already mentioned as the first born son of Satyavati. This lady was the daughter of a fisherman and was in her girlhood known as Matsyagandhi (fish-smelling) because she smelt of fish. In spite of the obnoxious smell, she was good to look at, and one day the great anchorite Parasara, while going on a journey through the forest in which she was then living, happened to meet the youthful beauty. The holy man was immediately overcome with an intense desire to beget a son on her ; the maiden too was in her Ritu or fertile period and the sage, coming to know of this auspicious time, addressed her in terms of love. The girl put forward feeble objections. One of these was her smell ; this the holy man converted into a pleasant fragrance by his powerful magic. The maiden, now convinced of the greatness of the man and the desirability of having a son like him, decided to give herself up to him. But it was daylight and she objected to open copulation in broad daylight. Parasara now created a smoke which surrounded them both, and under cover of this darkness the business of love was carried out.

After the business was over, Parasara went his way but Satyavati had to bear the consequences of her rash act. She conceived and had to be confined in an island by her father till she gave birth to her son Vyasa. Because of his birth and life on an island he was known as Dwaipayana (of an island) Vyasa. He became a great ascetic and a learned sage, and not only the authorship of the *Mahabharata* but even the compilation of the *Vedas* is attributed to him.

The birth of Vyasa did not prevent Satyavati from getting respectably married. In fact she married the great king Shantanu and a story is narrated in this connection. Shantanu had a genius for picking up wives during his hunting expeditions. We have noticed how he fell in with the river nymph Ganga in a forest and married her on her own condition. His marriage with Satyavati was brought about by circumstances not altogether dissimilar. While engaged in the pursuit of game he happened to see the maiden

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and intoxicated by the fragrance that emanated from her and by the sight of her beautiful body, approached her with a proposal of marriage. Satyavati, who had learnt a severe lesson from her adventure with Parasara, requested the royal suitor to ask her father for her hand as it was not proper for maidens to give themselves away in marriage. Shantanu's eloquent sermon on the greatness of the Gandharva rite failed to convince Satyavati. So he sought out her father and expressed his desire to wed the maiden. The fisherman, already saddled with one illegitimate grandson, was in no mood to take chances and demanded of the king that he should promise that Satyavati's son should inherit the kingdom and not Bhishma, Ganga's son. Shantanu loved Bhishma too well to disinherit him and went back to his kingdom without marrying Satyavati.

Torn between his passion for the fisherman's daughter and his duty towards his son, Shantanu could neither eat nor drink. Bhishma saw his father's plight and ascertained the cause of his misery. He then secretly proceeded to the forest abode of the fisherman and promised him that he would renounce the crown if Satyavati were given in marriage to his father. The fisherman, true to his trade, drove a hard bargain and asked Bhishma to remain celibate for life, lest any claimant for the throne should appear through Bhishma's marriage or his peccadillos. The dutiful Bhishma agreed to this also ; upon which the fisherman made over his daughter to Bhishma and the latter took her to his delighted parent.

The marriage of a girl by payment of a bride prize was also prevalent in the epic times. The Madras, a tribe noticed in the first chapter, practised this code of matrimonial morality. Madri was bought by Bhishma from her brother Salya as a bride for his nephew Pandu. The bride price was "wrought and unwrought gold, and many kinds of jewels in thousands ; elephants, horses and chariots, apparel and ornaments, precious stones, pearls and coral that shone". On receiving this treasure, Salya 'gave Bhishma his sister for it, having decked her out'. The concluding phrase is significant. The bride prize was usually spent in 'decking out' the bride, and was rarely retained by the guardian of the bride.

The *Mahabharata*, like all ancient Hindu works, deals mainly with the doings of gods, kings and sages, and the institutions mentioned therein refer to these exceptional individuals. It is difficult to find out from the epic the moral standards of the *people.* Probably each tribe practised its own traditional morality in conformity with the Hindu view that traditional practices should always be treated with respect. The generality of Brahmins, no doubt, followed the Vedic marriage ritual, though sages of exceptional powers and learning practised exceptional morality. Great Brahmins of much learning were usually lax in morals, and a proverb tells us that "a goat and a Veda learned Brahmin are equally lewd".

Sati was not common in epic times. There are, however, indications in the epics that wives in certain cases perished on the funeral pyres of their husbands. Madri, in whose arms her husband Pandu died, is said to have immolated herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. She did not do this as a matter of course, but as a penance for having, inadvertently though, brought about the death of her husband. Besides, there was a firm belief among ancient Hindus that interruption of the sex act was cruel, and in Pandu's case death before the completion of the business was thought to have left his unsatisfied soul in mid-air yearning for the company of his spouse. It was due to this belief that Madri decided to accompany the shades of her husband to the other world.

Kunti, the other wife of Pandu, did not perish with her husband and Madri. Similarly, many noble ladies of the *Mahabharata* outlived their husbands, and did not think it obligatory to accompany the souls of their husbands through suicide.

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The central point of morality in the epic times, as in the Vedic age, was the need for begetting sons, and marriage was considered a means for achieving this end. When this end could not be gained, a good deal of deviation from what was strictly orthodox was permitted.

Indiscriminate asceticism is condemned in the epics. An illuminating tale is told of the famous ascetic Jaratkaru in this connection. This Brahmin from his very childhood had a strong other-wordly leaning and gave himself up to asceticism. In his wanderings through mighty forests he once entered a huge cave, deep as a well. From the side of the cave there stuck out the branch of a tree and on this branch Jaratkaru found several men hanging head downwards from a feeble thread, and a mouse was noticed gnawing the thread which was about to break. The impending calamity to the emaciated men prompted Jaratkaru to make enquiries as to the nature of the sin which condemned them to such a punishment ; upon which the wretched creatures told Jaratkaru that they were his own ancestors about to be consigned to hell, not because of any sin they had committed but because he, Jaratkaru, their only surviving progeny, had taken to asceticism leaving none to perform the periodical rites to the dead which alone would prevent their fall into hell. Jaratkaru immediately stopped his wanderings and looked for a wife.

Though the principle that a married woman was a chattel of her husband obtained in the *Mahabharata* times too, the women of the epic exercised considerable influence in social, domestic and even in political affairs. Satyavati was always consulted on important affairs by Bhishma. Gandhari, wife of Dhritarashtra was a forceful woman who alone could inspire some respect in her independent son Duryodhana who always dominated his blind father. Similarly, Kunti, mother of the Pandava princes, had a say in all their political deliberations. The most interesting, assertive and forceful character that arrests the attention of the reader of the *Mahabharata* is the heroine Draupadi. She is truly life-like and represents the diverse characteristics of woman, her strength, weakness, egoism, loyalty, pride and vanity, and a more detailed reference to her is necessary.

Though technically the common property of the Pandava princes, especially of the eldest, Draupadi always commanded them. The way she controlled these turbulent warriors attracted the admiration and curiosity of her friend Satyabhama, Krishna's wife, who wished to know the secret of her power.

Satyabhama asks :

"Where lies thy strength ? What philtres rare
Avail to gain thine end ? Declare.
Do rites, oblations, prayers, conduce
To work thy will or lore abstruse ?
Or is thy grand success the fruit
Of any drug or herb or root ?
What art is thine, which fame ensures
And full connubial bliss secures ?
For I too seek to rule my lord :
Thy methods tell ; thy help afford."

Draupadi's detailed reply to these questions is intended to be a sermon to housewives. After telling Satyabhama that only foolish women would try to win their husbands' love and esteem through drugs, charms and witchcraft, Draupadi adds :

"Now, clamly hear how I proceed,

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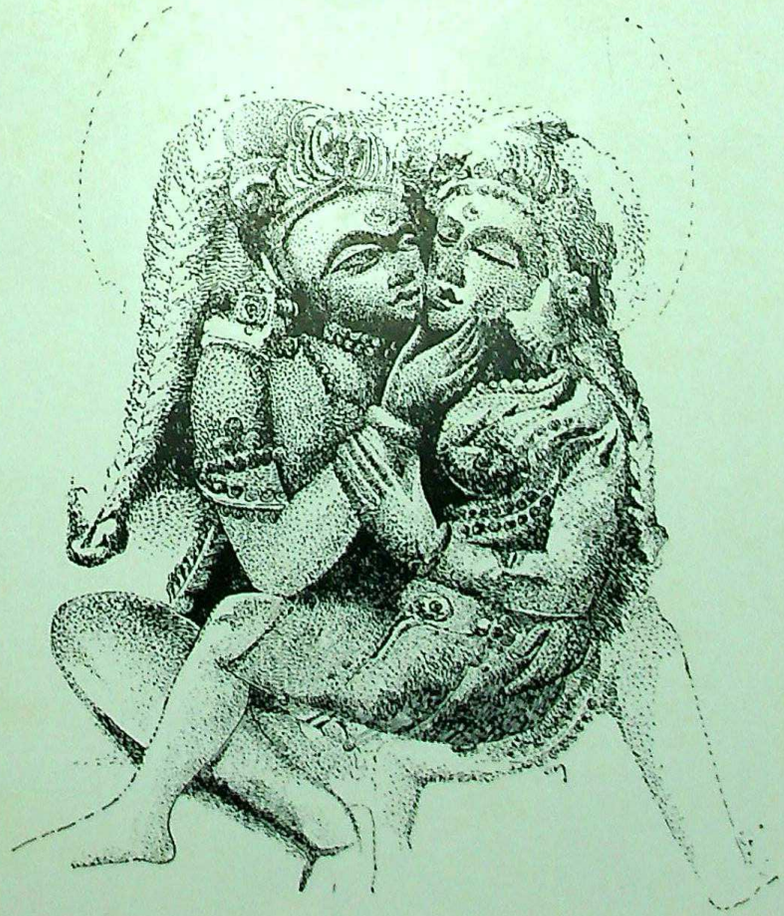
50 TOILET
From sculpture, Bhuvanesvar, Orissa : 10th Century A. D.



51 THE KISS, NORTHERN STYLE
From sculpture, Avantisvara Temple, Kashmir : 9th Century A. D.

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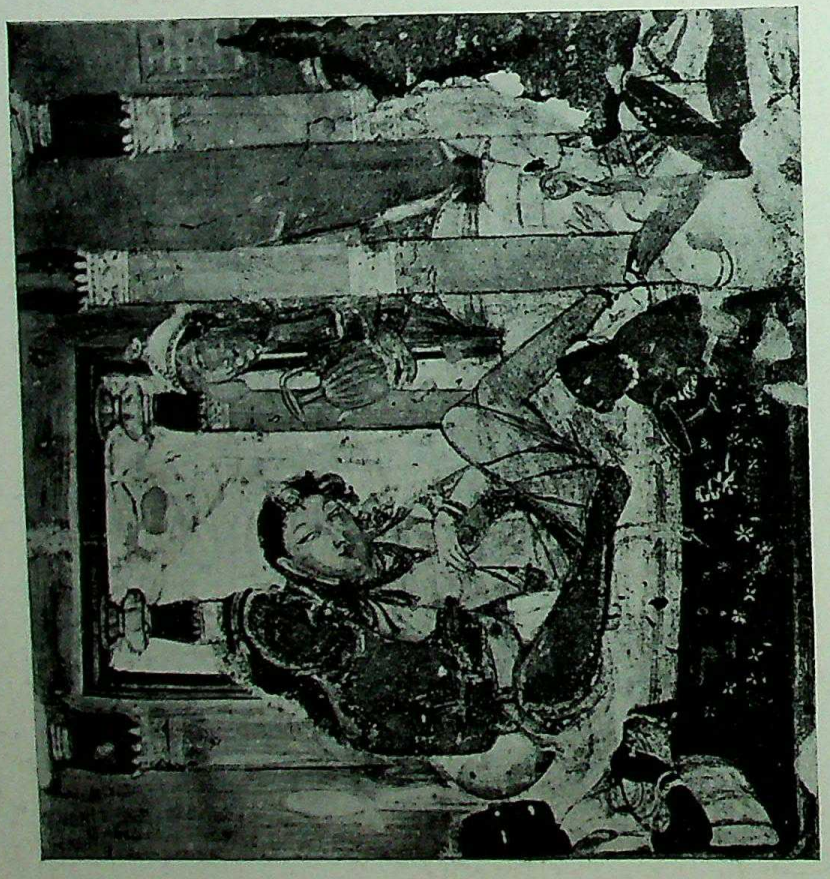
53 SHAKUNTHALA WITH HER TWO FRIENDS
Dushyanta is watching her stealthily
Rajput painting : 17th Century A. D



52 ROYAL LOVERS WITH ATTENDANTS
Ajanta painting : 2nd—6th Century A. D

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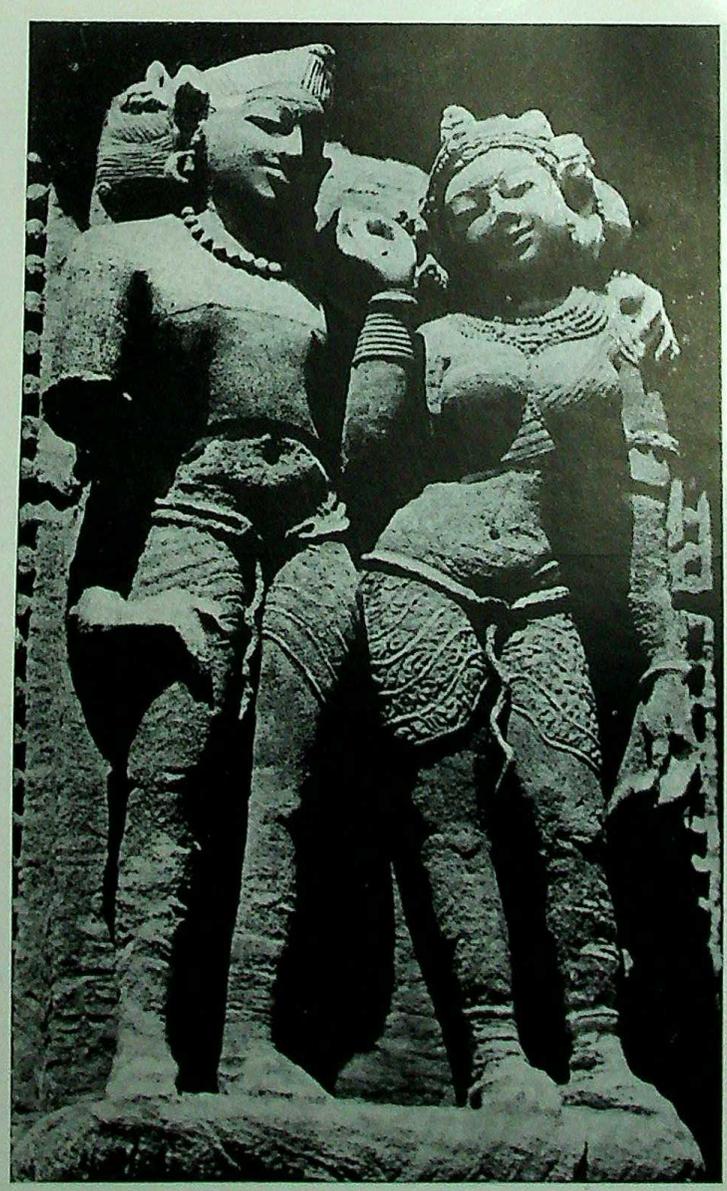
54 A DANCING GIRL
Vadnagar, N. Gujarat : 11th Century A. D.
Photo : C. J. Bhatt



55 LOVERS
Raja Rani Temple, 11th Century A. D., Bhuvanesvar, Orissa
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56 A YOUNG MOTHER FONDLING HER CHILD
Khiching : 11th Century A. D.
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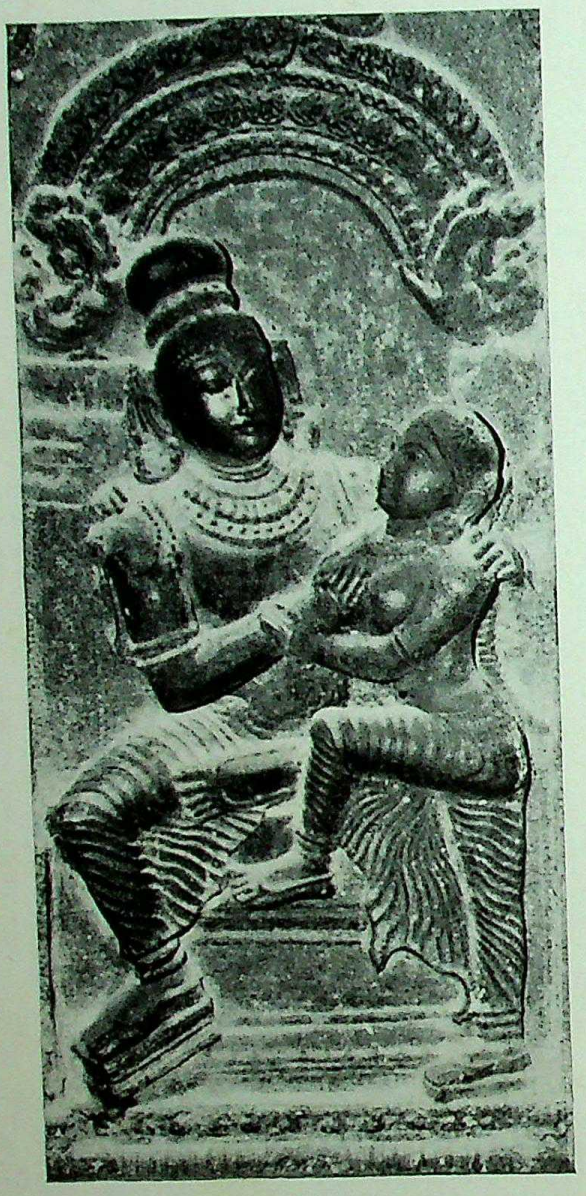

57 A PRINCE AND HIS LOVE
Pillar work at Ramaswami Temple, Kumbhakonam
S. India: 17th Century A. D.
Photo: K. Arunachalam

58 INDRA, KING OF GODS, AND HIS CONSORT
Mahabalipuram, S. India: 7th Century A. D.
Photo: A. K. Banerji

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Avoiding every tortuous deed.
I seek to win my husbands' hearts
By none but open, honest arts.
And so their willing hearts I rule ;
I never cajole them or befool,
Nor e'er on charms or drugs depend,
Their independent wills to bend.
From anger, pride and passion free,
I serve my lords most zealously.
Without parade of fondness, still,
Submissive, I their wish fulfill.
By fitting gestures, gentle speech,
And mien, and acts, my goal I reach.
Those lords, whose glance alone could kill,
I please with all my might and skill.
Though they are never harsh nor rude,
But always kind, and mild and good,
I act as if constrained by awe,
And treat their slightest hint as law.
No other object draws my love,
On earth beneath, or heaven above.
No handsome, wealthy, jewelled youth,
No god, could shake my plighted troth.
For no delight or joy I care,
Unless my lords the pleasure share.
Whene'er their home they chance to leave,
Dejected, pale, I fast and grieve.
Their homeward safe return I greet
With sparkling eyes, and welcome meet.
Till all their wants are well supplied,
I never for my own provide.
At meal time, I, without delay,
The food they love before them lay,
Served up in golden platters fair,
All burnished bright with constant care.
My house is clean, and fairly swept,
Well stocked and ordered, neatly kept.
As friends I own, and talk with, none
But virtuous women : bad I shun.
From all such words and acts I shrink
As well bred dames unseemly think.

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Loud laughter, foolish jests I hate,
And constant loitering at the gate.
My lords' behests I all observe,
From these I could not bear to swerve.
Just issued from the bath, and bright
In fair attire, with jewels dight,
Before my lords's appearing, I
Delight their eyes to gratify.
Whatever usage, rule or rite,
Whatever courtly forms polite,
My husbands' sires observed of old,
And they themselves in honour hold,
All these with never ceasing care
I carry out ; no toil I spare.
And here the way their mother shows,
Who all the past exactly knows.
Her will I follow ; her revere ;
And hold the noble woman dear.
By constant care, altertness, zeal,
I strive to work my husbands' weal.
Base women's wicked arts I shun ;
By nobler means my ends are won.
.....
To please her lord a virtuous wife
Should deem the object of her life.
To him her thoughts should ever turn ;
With love to him her should burn ;
Her hope is he, her refuge, God ;
And all her acts should wait his nod.
Strive, then, thy lord's esteem to win ;
A new career of love begin.
Whene'er his step without the gate
Is heard, start up, and on him wait.
With cheerful tact his wishes meet,
His palate please with viands sweet,
His every sense with pleasure sate ;
Within thy home a heaven create.
So doing, thou shalt make it clear
That he to thee is very dear ;
And then thy love perceiving, he
With answering love will cherish thee.

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This course will bring thee high renown,
Thy life with bliss connubial crown.*

It is not, however, Draupadi's domestic virtue that arrests our attention, but her pride and spirit of independence. She was, in no small measure responsible for the bitterness between the Kauravas and the Pandavas that led to the terrible carnage of the Mahabharata war. We have already noticed how Karna was openly insulted by her in the Swayamvara. The fact that Dhrishtadyumna, Draupadi's brother, who was in charge of the Swayamvara celebration did not object to Karna trying his luck with the bow shows that Karna was not generally considered low born or disqualified for the hand of the princess. He was a distinguished soldier, and Duryodhana of the blue-blooded lunar dynasty treated him as his bosom friend and equal. Karna was not certainly low born in comparison with Krishna, born and brought up among cowherds, who was nevertheless the greatest friend and ally of Draupadi.

Anyway, Draupadi's tactless declaration of the great warrior as low born in a public assembly was too much for the sensitive Karna. An insult by a woman is doubly humiliating in India. Karna did not say anything just then ; but he had his revenge later.

While pride of birth brought her the enmity of Karna, her love of frivolity made Draupadi an enemy of the powerful Duryodhana, the leader of the Kauravas. Duryodhana was a suitor who could not win Draupadi in the trial of the bow, and he had been considerably depressed by her loss to Arjuna. Soon after the Swayamvara, the identity of her husband was known to the Kauravas and Duryodhana learnt that the five princes had not perished in the conflagration but had escaped with their mother and were very much alive. The Pandava princes too, now that they had a powerful ally in Draupadi's father, made a public declaration of their identity and claimed for themselves the kingdom Duryodhana ruled. Duryodhana wished to contest the claim by an appeal to the sword. But better counsels prevailed, and under pressure from his ministers and elderly relatives he agreed to a partition of the kingdom. Accordingly the kingdom was equally divided between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, and the latter built a city at Indraprastha for their capital.

The palace of the five princes at Indraprastha was a miracle of architecture, and Duryodhana was invited by the princes to see it. Duryodhana accepted the invitation, and while he was taken round the palace he mistook water for a crystal floor and fell into a tank. Draupadi who was watching him laughed aloud. In India respect is always due to elders, and Duryodhana was Draupadi's senior in age ; moreover, it was highly unbecoming of the queen to laugh at an honoured guest. The loss of Draupadi in the Swayamvara and her insult of his friend Karna were causes of annoyance to Duryodhana, and her behaviour in the palace at Indraprastha fanned the flame of hatred in him. And soon Draupadi paid for her tactlessness, and dearly too.

The old enmity between the Kauravas and Pandavas again flared forth and Duryodhana decided to win the Pandava's kingdom in a gambling contest. With this object in view he invited Yudhishtira to his palace. Yudhishtira loved gambling ; moreover, royal etiquette in those days demanded that an invitation to gambling should not be declined. So Yudhishtira accepted the challenge and went to Duryodhana's palace for the game of dice. In the game, Yudhishtira began to lose heavily. He gambled away his kingdom, his four brothers and finally himself. Thus the five princes became the slaves of the Kauravas. "You have but your common wife Draupadi left, now," said Duryodhana tauntingly, "why not offer her as a last stake, Yudhistira ?"

* Tr. J. Muir.

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The ruined gambler, maddened by his losses, accepted the challenge and offered Draupadi as a stake. The dice were thrown, and Yudhishtira lost.

Duryodhana now decided to humiliate Draupadi in a most objectionable manner. He wanted to denude her in public !

He despatched a messenger to the palace at Indraprastha which was close by, to ask Draupadi to appear before him in the royal assembly. When the messenger conveyed Duryodhana's order to Draupadi intimating to her that she was lost in gambling and was, as such, Duryodhana's slave, she put up a spirited objection. When Yudhishtira offered her as a stake, she argued, he had already gambled himself away ; hence he was not his own master and had no right to offer her as a stake. The messenger returned to Duryodhana and intimated to him what Draupadi had told him. The argument, however, did not convince Duryodhana and he sent his brutal brother Dussasana to Indraprastha to fetch the chattering woman. Draupadi put forth the same objection but Dussasana was not well acquainted with the technicalities of property rights and he dragged her by the hair all the way from Indraprastha to the court of Duryodhana. In the court too, where all the elders sat in counsel, Draupadi put up a strong case for her independence on the plea that Yudhishtira had no right to offer her as a stake when he himself had become a slave to Duryodhana. Duryodhana contended that Yudhishtira, in gambling away his brothers and himself, had already gambled away what belonged to him including his wife who was but one of the chattels. Karna supported this view and added that a woman who was the common wife of five men was outside the pale of ordinary codes of morality and chivalry. Now Dussasana, under orders from Duryodhana, dragged her by the hair and tried to disrobe her. A momentary paralysis seized her warlike husbands, and none of them was able to raise a finger in her defence. The elders too could not intervene because a woman offered as a stake in a game was the property of the winner and he could do what he liked with her. Draupadi now appealed to Krishna and by his intervention she was saved the humiliation of complete denudation. A superstitious fear now seized Dhritarashtra and this king in supersession of the orders of his son commanded Draupadi to be released and granted her and her husbands their freedom.*

The terrible insult had to be avenged. Draupadi swore that she would not tie her hair except by anointing it with the blood of Dussasana. From then onwards her one incentive to living was the thought of revenge. Draupadi with her husbands and their mother had to go into exile and in her long wanderings in the dreadful forests, she constantly reminded her husbands of her terrible wrongs and the need for revenge. The pious Yudhishtira often thought of making peace with his adversaries, and once succeeded in persuading Krishna to go to the Kauravas on a mission of peace. Even the militant Bhima and Arjuna thought of burying the hatchet and closed in with their elder brother's proposal. But Draupadi called the envoy of peace aside and said to him secretly, pointing to her unbound hair:

"Of this hair dragged upwards by Dussasana's hand shalt thou, O lotus-eyed one, think on every occasion if thou wouldst make peace with the foes. If Bhima or Arjuna, those miserable wretches have wish for peace, O Krishna, then will my old father fight beside his sons, the great chariot fighters. And my five sons with the strength of heroes will fight with Abhimanyu at their head against the Kurus. But if I do not see Dussasana's black arm lying hewn off and covered with dust, how is my heart to find rest ? Thirteen years have gone by me in hoping and waiting, while I have been fostering my anger within me like a burning fire. My heart wounded by the arrows of Bhima's speech, is bursting asunder, for this strong armed one now only looks to pious virtue !"

* For details please see *Epics, Myths and Legends of India.*

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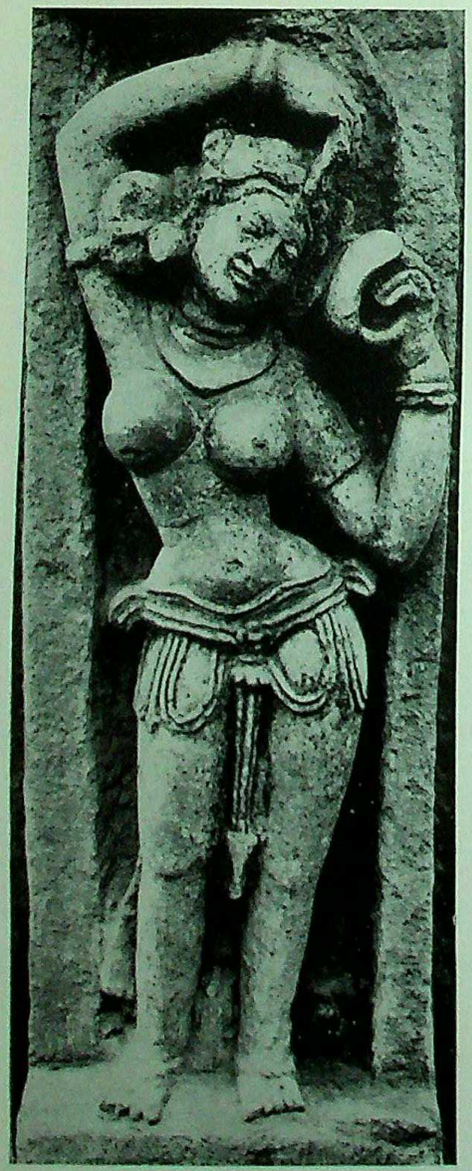

59 TOILET
Khiching, Mayurbhanj: 11th Century A. D.
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60 TOILET
Bhuvanesvar, Orissa : 10th Century A. D.
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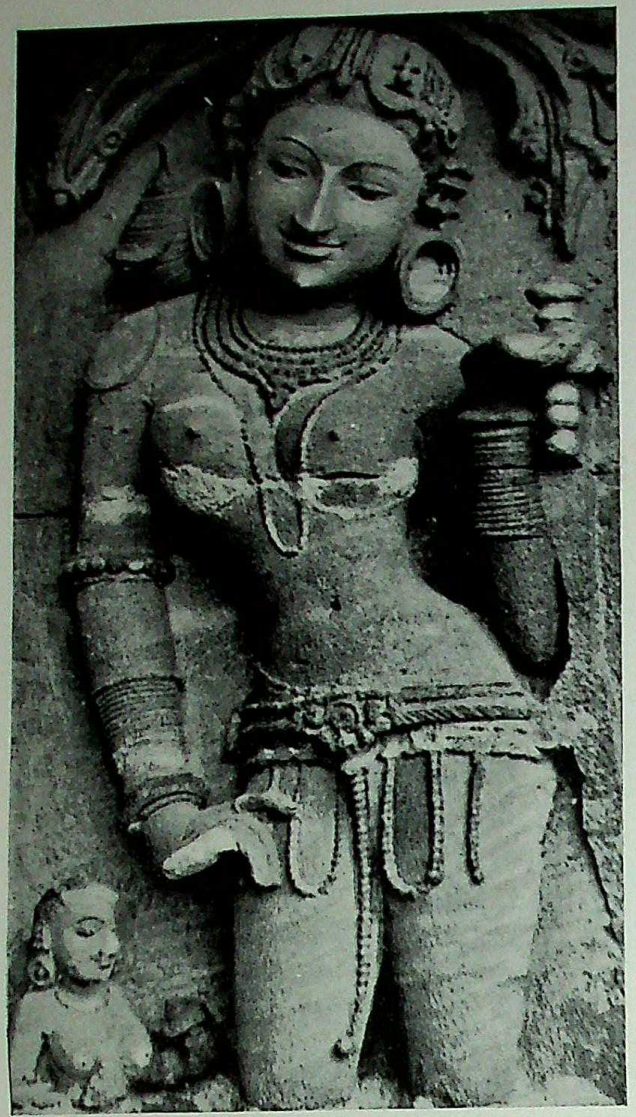
61 RISHI PATNI (WIFE OF A SAGE)
Vellore Temple: 17th Century, A. D.
Photo : E. S. Mahalingam



62 A SMILING BEAUTY
Bhuvanesvar, Orissa : 10th Century A. D.
Photo : C. J. Bhatt

63 THE LOVE LETTER
Bhuvanesvar : 10th Century A. D.
Art of India and Pakistan, Leigh Ashton

64 A DANCE POSE
Marble carving, Dilwara Temple, Mt. Abu: 11th Century A.D.
Photo : A. K. Banerji

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65 A CELESTIAL DANCER
Belur : 12 Century A. D.
Photo : A. K. Banerji

66 PILLAR WORK
Depicting Krishna with Radha and Rukhmini. Ramaswami Temple, Kumbhakonam : 17th Century A. D.
Photo : K. Arunachalam

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68 A DANCE POSE
Halebid, Mysore : 12th Century A. D.

67 A LADY WITH A MIRROR
Belur Temple, Mysore : 12th Century A. D.

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Krishna consoled her by an assurance that even as she was weeping, would the wives of her foes weep for their dead husbands ere long. "The Himalaya mountains may move from their place," said Krishna, "the earth be shattered into a hundred fragments, the sky with its stars fall down—but my words cannot stay unfulfilled."

This prophesy was soon fulfilled. Draupadi anointed her hair with the blood of Dussasana's hewn arm, and her craze for revenge was sated. True, her sons, brothers and many a near relative perished in the carnage and her triumph was shadowed by much grief ; yet it was a triumph and she suffered the loss like a woman.

Characteristic of Draupadi is her occasional lapses into blasphemous exasperation at the apparent blindness of the Almighty to the injustice obvious in the universe. Seeing her own virtuous husbands and their aged mother suffering untold hardships during their exile, while the wicked Kauravas enjoyed the pleasures of life in their palace, Draupadi thus addresses her eldest husband :

"Beholding noble men distrest,
Ignoble men enjoying good,
Thy righteous self by woe pursued,
Thy wicked foe by fortune blest,
I charge the Lord of All—the strong,
The strong, the partial Lord—with doing wrong.
His dark, mysterious, sovereign will
To men their several lots decrees ;
He favours some with wealth and ease,
Some dooms to every form of ill.
.....
As trees from river banks are riven
And swept away when rains have swelled
The streams, so men by Time impelled
To action, helpless, on are driven.
God does not show for all mankind
A parent's love, and wise concern ;
But acts like one unfeeling, stern,
Whose eyes caprice and passion blind".*

Yudhishtira replies her in the patent style of the pious ; hut his reply is unconvincing although Draupadi pretends to agree with him.

* * * * * *

Very different from Draupadi is Sita, the heroine of the other Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*. *Ramayana* is a later work than the *Mahabharata*, but it deals with an earlier epoch. The Brahminic spirit completely dominates the poem, and its heroine Sita is a highly idealized being too spiritual and good to be real. Both the hero Rama and the heroine Sita are strict monogamists, observing all the rules of conventional morality. Sita was won by Rama in a trial of the bow, but even this formality was but an incident in the predestined union between them.

* Tr. J. Muir.

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Since the time of the codes, Sita became the paragon of womanly virtue among the Hindus, and to this day the orthodox Hindu wife's one ambition is to emulate the example of Sita. Hence it is desirable to acquaint the reader with some of the qualities of this model of feminine virtue.

The greatness of Sita lay in her complete self-surrender to her husband and in her readiness to suffer for and with him. When Rama, on the eve of his coronation, was, by a cruel fate, banished into the forests of Dandaka, Sita as a dutiful wife prepared to follow him. But all including Rama tried their utmost to dissuade the princess from the decision she had taken. Rama spoke to her at length of the horrors of life in a forest, and warned her that, born and brought up in a palace she would not be able to live with him in the jungle. But this was Sita's reply to Rama :

A wife must share her husband's fate.
My duty is to follow thee
Wherever thou goest. Apart from thee,
I will not dwell in heaven itself.
Deserted by her lord, a wife is like a miserable corpse.
Close as thy shadow would I cleave to thee in this life and hereafter.
Thou art my king, my guide, my only refuge, my divinity.
It is my fixed resolve to follow thee. If thou must wander forth
Through thorny trackless forests, I will go before thee, treading down
The prickly brambles to make smooth thy path. Walking before thee, I
Shall feel no weariness : the forest thorns will seem like silken robes ;
The bed of leaves, a couch of down. To me the shelter of thy presence
Is better far than stately palaces, and paradise itself.
Protected by thy arm, gods, demons, men shall have no power to harm me.
With thee I'll live contendedly on roots and fruits, sweet or not sweet,
If given by thy hand, they will to me be like the food of life.
Roaming with thee, e'en hell itself would be to me a heaven of bliss.

So young Sita followed Rama into exile and wandered with him in the forests of Dandaka treading thorny paths and living on jungle fare. Rama's brother Lakshmana also went into voluntary exile with Rama to whom he was devoted. Lakshmana was even more strictly moral than Rama. He was a celibate whose only pleasure was in serving the cause of his elder brother. Such was Lakshmana's aversion to women that when the bold wandering princess Surpanakha, sister of Ravana, king of Lanka, made overtures to him and threatened to force him he cut off her nose and breasts. A more amazing story is told of this impossible celibate. Although he lived years with Rama and Sita in the forests of Dandaka, he could not recognize Sita when her identity had to be established in a queer situation, because in all his life in the forests he had not looked at the face of his sister-in-law ! The story is in keeping with the impossible morality preached in the epic.

The devotion of Sita to her husband, however, brought a good deal of trouble upon him and herself. Rama and Lakshmana found it very hard to guard her in the wild forests of Dandaka, infested with savages, wild beasts and wandering demons. Evading their vigilance, Ravana, the wicked demon king of Lanka (Ceylon) abducted and carried her off to his famous palace in Lanka. But Sita refused to yield herself to the ravisher. Neither the splendour of his court nor his threats could detract her from her devotion to her husband.

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Immune from harm by Ravana through the occult powers obtained through her constancy, Sita lived meditating upon the form of Rama.

After a terrible war, Rama killed Ravana, conquered Lanka and redeemed Sita. When the couple met, after the long separation, a pathetic contrast between the hero and his wife was revealed. The fond wife fell at her husband's feet and shed tears of joy. But the cold, melancholy Rama told her that he would not accept her. For he said :

> Ravana bore thee through the sky
> And fixed on thine his evil eye ;
> About thy waist his arms he threw,
> Close to his breast his captive drew ;
> And kept thee, vassal of his power,
> An inmate of his ladies' bower.

He had fought the war to vindicate his honour and punish the evil-doer, but not with the intention of taking his wife back. The idea is in perfect harmony with the social codes of later Hinduism. A woman abducted or forced by an outcaste was usually considered polluted beyond redemption and was not taken back into the caste she belonged ; all the same, the husband or the relatives were enjoined to punish the evil-doer. It was in this spirit that Rama made war on Ravana but rejected Sita after she was rescued.

We can very well imagine what reply the spirited Draupadi would have given her husbands if they had preached to her such a cold-blooded philosophy. In her case dragging by the hair and even public denudation did not bring pollution and she was taken back with all honour by her husbands. But poor, suffering Sita could only protest her innocence and purity, and weep pitifully. Finding that wailing did not convince her husband, she decided to undergo the fire ordeal. A pyre was lit and she jumped into the burning flames ; the flames did not hurt her and a celestial voice proclaimed her innocence. On this Rama accepted her.

But the sensitive conscience of Rama was again troubled. Rumours of public disapproval of the king's acceptance of his wife after her stay with the notorious womanizer of Lanka spread in the kingdom of Ayodhya. A spy even reported that a washerman, while beating his wife suspected of adultery, drove home the point by observing that he was not a fool like his king to believe that a woman kept by a scoundrel for years could be pure. Rama was again overcome by doubts ; besides, it was impossible to rule a kingdom where even his lowest subject held the king's morals in contempt.

So Rama had to vindicate his honour and he sent Sita, already big with child, to a forest to live in the hermitage of the sage Valmiki. Sita accepted her husband's comands without resentment, and lived a lonely life in the hermitage. Here she gave birth to her sons, the twins Lov and Kus.

Some years later, Rama wished to see his wife and children and sent for them. Sita, all along pining for Rama, came to her beloved husband with a glad heart. On her arrival Rama again asked her to prove her purity. This was too much even for the all-suffering Sita. She prayed to mother earth to put an end to her life ; and in answer to her prayer the earth gaped open and Sita disappeared in the yawning chasm !

Sita is an unreal, other-wordly ideal invented by the ultra-spiritually minded priestly class. The *Ramayana* itself is dominated by the highly spiritualized ideal of Brahminism and its tone is essentially devotional. It shows little interest in the pleasures of life, life and the world appearing as passing phantoms in a gigantic scheme of spiritual reality. With all this, the heroine of the Ramayana has become the ideal of womanhood of later

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Hinduism. Suffering is the strength and glory of woman, sings the *Ramayana*, and to this day this is the song of orthodox Hinduism.

There are other characters in the *Ramayana*, more wordly and real than Sita, but none of them has the stature of Draupadi or Sita. One of those feminine characters is Kaikeyi—Rama's step-mother.

Kaikeyi was responsible for sending Rama into exile. She was the youngest of the four wives of Dasaratha, Rama's father, and on the eve of Rama's coronation she prevailed upon the old dotard to exile Rama and enthrone her son Bharata as king. She achieved her purpose by an exceptionally strong will. But by nature Kaikeyi was unwise, thoughtless and vain. She was easily led astray by her nurse. She showed none of the qualities that distinguished Draupadi as a woman apart. Kaikeyi was, in fact, rejoicing with Kausalya, Rama's mother, on the prince's forthcoming coronation when her old nurse Mandhara, the hunchback, worked upon her childish vanity and instigated her to ask her husband for Rama's exile and secure the throne for her son Bharata. Once she was worked up, Kaikeyi acted with tremendous energy and in spite of the protests, pleadings and pitiful wailings of her old husband she compelled him to exile Rama. The old man died of sorrow on Rama's departure.

Bharata, Kaikeyi's son, was not in Ayodhya at the time and when he came home and learnt all that had happened, he was filled with fury. He loved Rama and had no desire for a throne which by right belonged to his elder brother and he told his mother so. Kaikeyi was helpless against her irate son and was completely at a loss to defend her action and convince Bharata of the advantages of kingship.

Kaikeyi is a mere child wife spoiled by a doting husband, and has little wisdom or consistency. A more dignified and matronly type is Kausalya, Rama's mother, who had suffered much because of Dasaratha's attachment to the young and vivacious Kaikeyi.

The *Ramayana* preaches strict monogamy, though polygamy is permitted to kings and sages as a special case. Polyandrous practices are mentioned as existing among demons and apes. The practice was considered unworthy of Aryans.

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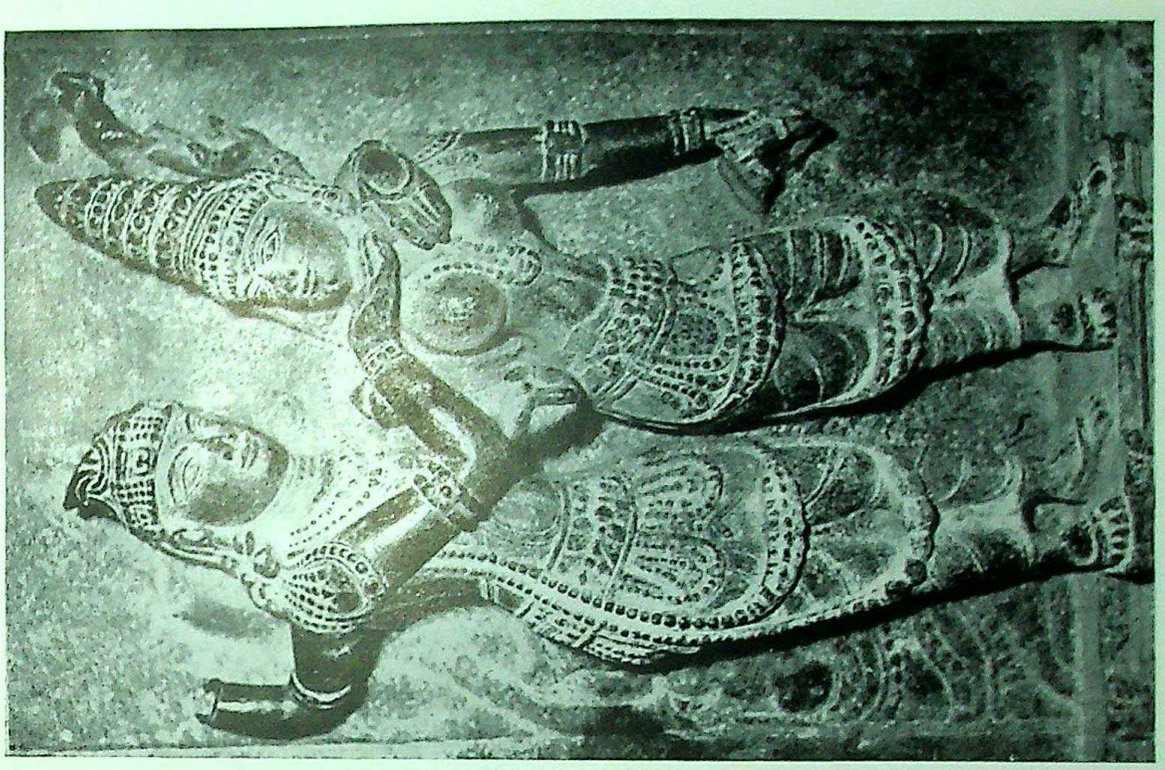
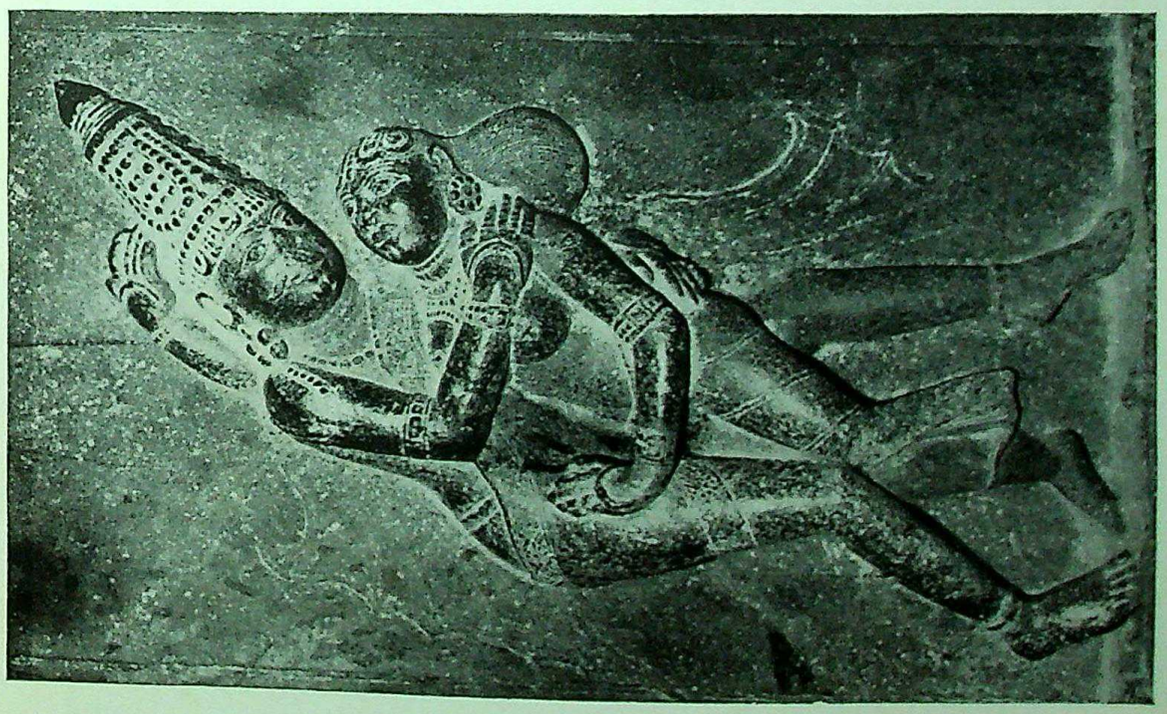


69 BLISS



70 SHIVA AND PARVATI IN AN AMOROUS POSE

Vellore Temple: 17th Century A.D

Photos: E. S. Mahalingam

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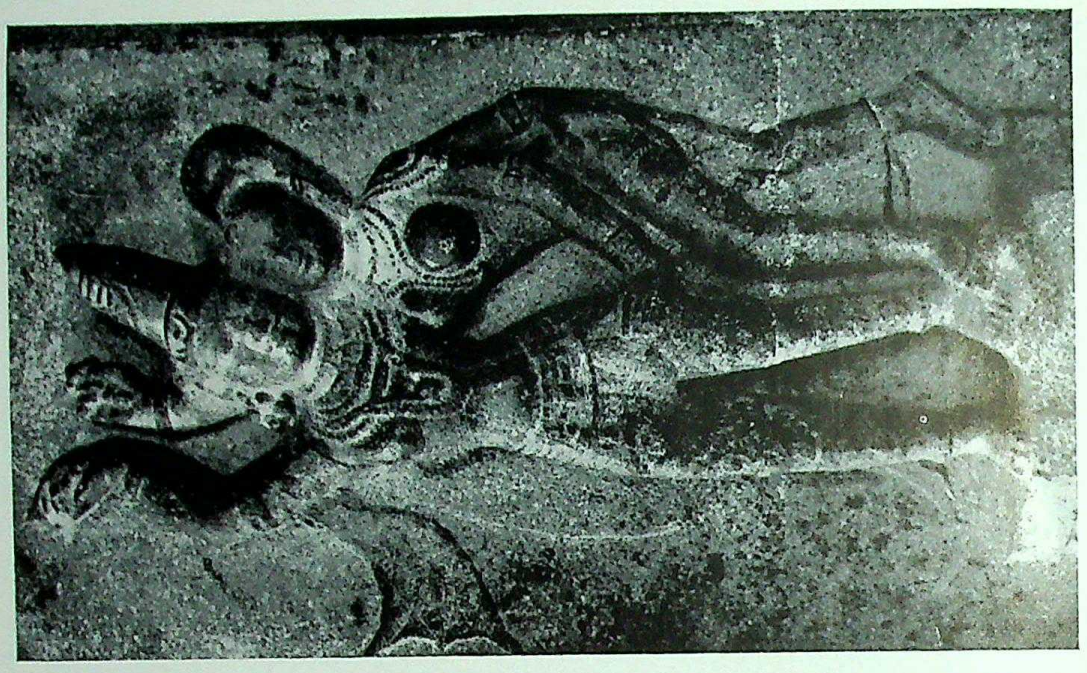
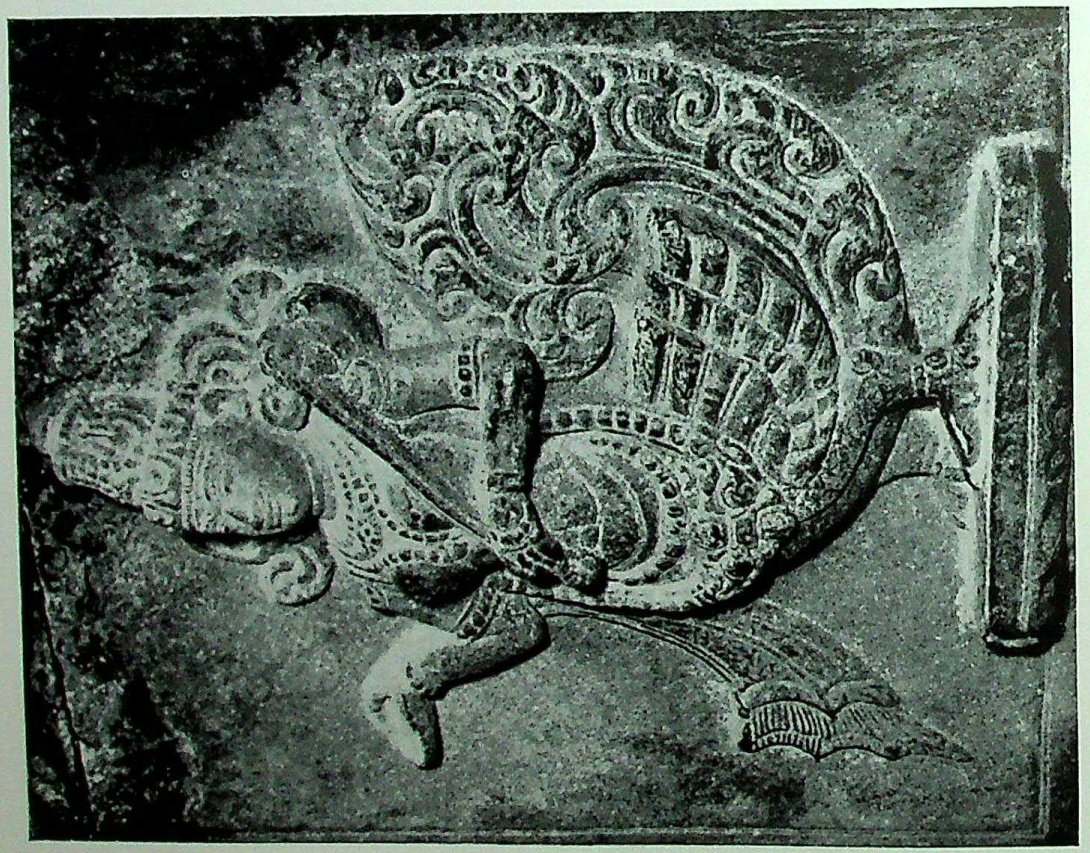


72 DANCERS



71 GANDHARVA OR CELESTIAL MUSICIAN

Vellore Temple: 17th Century A. D.
Photos: E. S. Mahalingam

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73 A KINNARA COUPLE : KINNARAS ARE CELESTIAL MUSICIANS
Ajanta : 2nd Century A. D.
Photo : A. K. Banerji

74 COUPLE
Ajanta : 2nd Century A. D.
Photo : A. L. Syed

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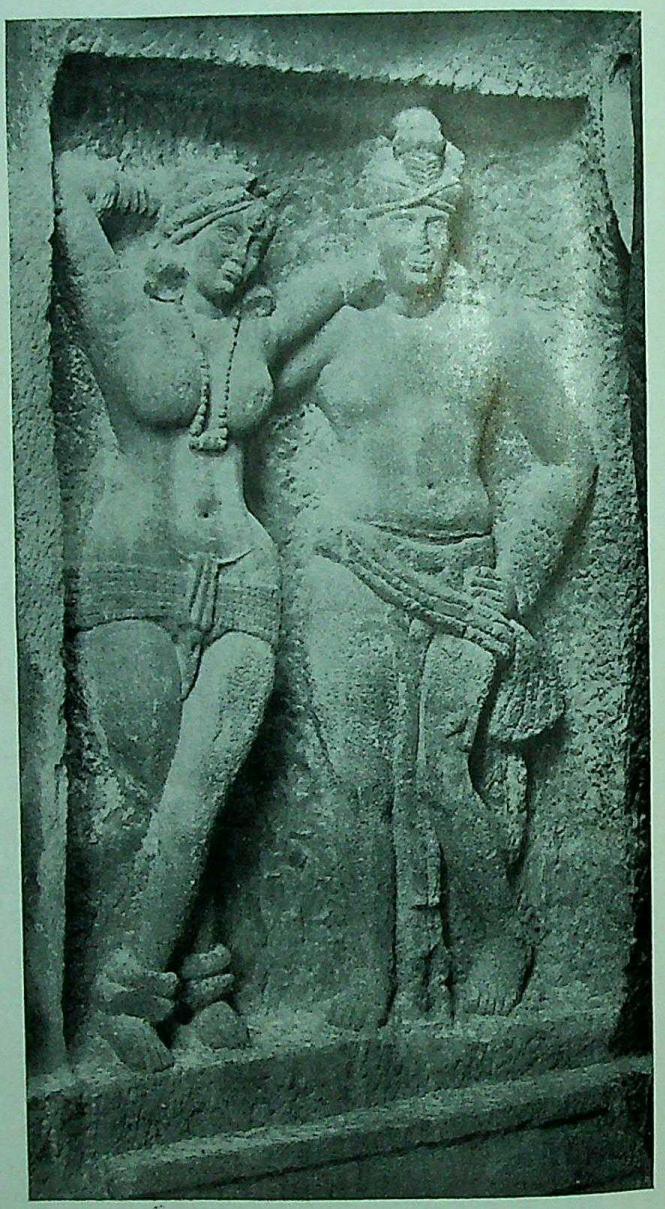
75 LOVERS
Rajarani Temple, Bhuvanesvar, Orissa : 10th Century A. D.



76 COUPLE
Karla Cave, 1st Century B. C.

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Chapter Four

MEDIEVAL MORALITY

European and Muslim travellers who visited medieval India found the status of Hindu women low indeed. Every woman of the upper castes was married in childhood. Polygamy was in full force. Every visitor to India has recorded the harrowing tales of Sati, an institution he found nowhere else in the civilised world of the time. Those widows who did not burn themselves to death suffered a worse fate. The only free women in the country were courtesans who dominated the social life of the city.

This state of affairs was certainly not in keeping with the spirit of the *Vedas* and the *Mahabharata*. The cause of the degeneration of women in medieval India must be looked for in the Dharma Sastras, the law books of the Hindus. The Dharma Sastras enforced the patriarchal, priestly ideal on society in general and women in particular. The flexible traditions of the *Mahabharata* were abandoned for a strict and rigid moral code. The author of the *Ramayana*, as we have seen, showed considerable priestly passion to popularize the spiritual conception of marriage which reduced woman to an appendage of the man she married. This tendency was accentuated by the codifiers of Hindu law and the codes, about twenty in number, are tireless in their insistence on watching and guarding women and keeping them in a state of perpetual dependence on man.

Several factors contributed towards the adoption of this attitude by the legislators. On the conquest of India by Aryans, there were in all probability, inter-racial marriages between the Aryans and the native population. This naturally alarmed those Aryans who wished to maintain the purity of their race. Again, the native population was probably struck by the beauty of the fair Aryan women, and abductions, seductions and rape of them by men of impure blood were common. The attitude of Aryan males towards these crimes was that of the present-day White Americans who often find themselves involved in similar situations with the Negroes. Hindu law became so strict in this matter that a woman abducted, seduced or raped by a non-Aryan was abandoned and never taken back, a practice still obtaining among orthodox communities in India. The story of Sita, already narrated in the previous chapter, bears ample testimony to this Hindu view of morality. A broader view, however, prevailed in certain quarters that a seduced, abducted or raped woman could be taken back after her periods which were believed to cleanse her of her physical and spiritual contamination. This view is now being widely popularised as the widespread communal riots in India led to large scale abductions and conversions and raised peculiar social problems for the Hindus.

Another factor that demanded exceptional vigilance on the part of husbands in the matter of guarding their wives was the Hindu passion for sons of one's own blood for valid performance of funeral rites which alone could ensure bliss in the kingdom to come. An adopted son or one begotten in levirate was, no doubt, competent to perform the funeral obsequies, but a son begotten in adultery was not. Woman naturally being fickle, according to holy sages, it was the duty of every Aryan who feared to be a cuckold to guard his wife. Economic jealousy and property rights in women, the essential vices of a patriarchate, also contributed towards the promulgation of the strict moral codes of Indo-Aryan legislators.

Of all the law books, the code of Manu is considered the most authentic and ancient. Other law givers drew mainly from Manu, and Manu himself from the *Grihya Sutras* (domestic rules of conduct) of Asvalayana and other writers of the post-Vedic period. The codes represent an epoch of intense priestly activity to spiritualize the whole conception of life and elevate the soul at the expense of the body ; during this period not only the epics and the *Grihya Sutras* but even the *Vedas* were interpolated by unscrupulous writers so as to advance their pet theories. Earlier codes, generally more sensible than later ones, were

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interpolated by minor legislators who wrote later. Hence most of the sacred books of the Hindus, including the codes, are, as they stand at present, self-contradictory in their teachings.

The predominant note of the codes, as far as our subject is concerned, is that a woman is incapable of looking after herself, and as such should not be allowed to be free. Says Manu :

> In childhood must a father guard his daughter ;
> In youth the husband shields his wife ; in age
> A mother is protected by her sons—
> Ne'er should a woman lean upon herself.

A woman by her marriage lost her individuality. She became the appendage of her husband, and had in theory no existence apart from him :

> Whatever the character and mind
> Of him to whom a woman weds herself,
> Such qualities her nature must imbibe,
> E'en as a river blending with the sea.

The greatness and salvation of a woman depended upon her devotion to her husband and nothing else. The sacred literature of the period is full of illuminating stories of women who obtained super-human powers by their whole hearted devotion to husbands. One such story, narrated in the *Markandeya Purana*, of Anasuya, a paragon of wifely devotion, may be mentioned as an illustration. Anasuya was most punctilious in acceding to every request of her lame husband, and one day this worthy expressed a desire to spend a night with one of the well-known courtesans of the city. Anasuya not only fell in with the proposal immediately, but took her husband on her shoulders and carried him to the house of the courtesan. On the way, however, a sage crossing their path passed very close to Anasuya's husband, and this disturbed his contemplation of the charm of the courtesan he was going to meet. The angry lover struck the holy man and this person cursed him to die before sunrise. Now Anasuya did not wish her husband to die, and by the occult powers she had obtained by devotion to her husband commanded the sun not to rise the next day. The luminary could not but obey the command. The world was now plunged into darkness, and the distressed gods prevailed upon the sage to cancel his curse.

With such stories constantly dinned into her ears, it was not difficult for the Hindu woman to believe the need for whole hearted devotion to her husband. Sati was a manifestation of this tendency and many a widow jumped into the burning pile with a glad heart.

The law givers lay down detailed instructions as to how a woman should behave towards her husband to show her subordination. Even in the matter of eating and drinking she should be careful to give him precedence. "Narada enjoins that a man shall quickly drive out of his house a woman that eats before her husband." According to Vasishta, another law giver, "if a man eats together with his wife, his sons will be without manly power." Baudhayana, however, mentions that in the south it was usual for a man to eat with his wife and observes that the custom was good enough for southerners. It was considered exceptionally meritorious for a wife to eat the leavings of her husband.

While the general tendency of the law books is to treat women with contempt and classify them with children and slaves, there are certain passages which emphasize the need for honouring them. In the code of Manu is found the following passage :

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"Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased ; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards.

"Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes ; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers.

"The houses on which female relations, not being duly honoured pronounce a curse, perish completely as if destroyed by magic.

"Hence men who seek their own welfare, should always honour women, and on holidays and festivals bestow on them gifts of ornaments, fine clothes and dainty food."

The passage is out of tune with the spirit of the code and may have been an interpolation by a writer with Sakta leanings. Anyway, some of the codes preach an attitude towards women more lenient than that practised by their followers.

In medieval India knowledge of letters was considered disreputable for respectable women. Some ladies of the aristocracy, of course, had the benefit of a sound education ; but as a rule the art of reading and writing was considered the undesirable accomplishment of a courtesan. "It is a shame for a young woman or girl to hold a paper or book in her hand, or to read in the presence of others in her husband's house. It is a popular belief in high caste women that their husbands will die if they should read or hold a pen in their fingers."* "A belief is also generally entertained that intrigue is facilitated by a knowledge of letters on the part of females."

An institution supported by the codes and assiduously practised by their followers was child marriage. One of the main reasons for enforcing child marriage in the community was the medieval superstition connected with Ritu. Ritu, the few days immediately following the menstrual flow, was considered the fertile period in women and it was thought a crime to let it go waste. The Aryans, who were then yearning for many sons, made copulation compulsory during this period. Even strict moral laws were abandoned in favour of satisfying a woman's craving for a son during her Ritu, and ascetics condescended to cohabit with women when their Ritu stood in danger of going waste.

To ensure copulation in the first Ritu, it was binding on a man to get his daughter married before she reached puberty. Besides a grown up girl was more difficult to guard than a child, and a father was quite anxious to get his daughter married before she became too troublesome for watching.

The proper age for marriage of a girl was believed to be between eight and twelve. Manu says that if a girl remained unmarried after reaching puberty, the father had failed in his duty towards her, and she could resort to the unsocial action of choosing a husband for herself. Parasara, the law specialist for the modern Kaliyuga went so far as to declare that the parents or guardians of a girl in whose house a girl reached puberty before marriage would assuredly go to hell.

These terrible warnings had the desired effect. For no social law has been so well respected among the Hindus as that enforcing child marriage. From the time of the promulgation of the codes till recently when the Sarda Act was passed, every caste Hindu had been most careful to get his daughters married in childhood. In fact to have a grown up unmarried girl in the house was considered a shame and humiliation. Child marriage became a craze and the marriage of infants was common. Some people got embryos married ; in these cases two pregnant women underwent the formalities of marriage in the hope that the child of one would be male and that of the other female, the marriage being considered null and void if it turned out to be otherwise. Marriage was a religious duty for

* *The High Caste Hindu Woman*, Pundita Ramabai.

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all women, and an old maid was an impossibility in medieval India although we have mention of such ladies in the Vedic literature.

In child marriage, nuptials did not take place till the girl reached puberty. Some law givers, however, ordain that sexual intercourse is permissible even before puberty 'as even very young children might do something improper' ; there is no doubt that the injunctions of these pious men were practised by a good many people.

The codes recognize eight forms of marriage. These are :

(1) Brahma, (2) Daiva, (3) Prajapatya, (4) Arsha, (5) Gandharva, (6) Paisacha, (7) Rakshasa, and (8) Asura. Of these, the first four are approved forms of marriage, the fifth is considered undesirable and the last three positively objectionable though valid when performed.

In the Brahma form (the marriage is named after Brahma the creator) a man invites a bridegroom of much learning and great repute and gives his daughter in marriage to him, having decked her out for the occasion. This is considered the best form of marriage by the Hindus of the orthodox school and is even now a very popular form of marriage, though bridegrooms or rather their parents often give a wide interpretation to the phrase 'having decked her out' and demand that the bride should carry a fortune about her person. In the Brahma form the bride and bridegroom are passive agents with no choice in the matter of their marriage, the marriage being contracted solely by their parents.

The Prajapatya form is named after Prajapatis or celestial patriarchs. In this form the bridegroom on arrival is worshipped with the prescribed rites, and the girl is bestowed on him with the injunction, "Go, both of you, and jointly discharge the duties of a house-holder." It does not differ materially from the Brahma form except in name. Some of the law givers do not mention the Prajapatya form.

In the Daiva (celestial) form, a householder bestows his daughter on a priest officiating in a sacrifice, more or less as a gift, in recognition of his learning and piety. This was prevalent in the Vedic age, but now sacrifices have gone out of fashion and with them the Daiva marriage.

The distinguishing feature of the Arsha form is that a bull and a cow are given by the bridegroom to the father of the bride. Some commentators maintain that this amounts to the purchase of the bride and as such the marriage is not completely free from commercial motives ; while others contend that the gift of a pair of cattle is purely religious and as such the marriage is as meritorious as the other three. The Arsha is probably a modified form of the Asura which we shall describe presently. Anyway it is an ancient ritual which does not obtain at present.

These four forms are said to be the best for Aryans. Sons born of these marriages, "become possessed of the energy of Brahma and are recognized by honest men. Handsome, wealthy, renowned, possessed of fortitude and good qualities, virtuous and amply provided with all objects of enjoyment, these sons live for a hundred years."

The Gandharva is love marriage pure and simple. For obvious reasons this is performed in secret by the lovers without the aid of priests and spells. The marriage is named after the Gandharvas, celestial musicians, who are said to live in free love. The law givers condemn Gandharva marriages, and tell us that children born of such unions are sure to be feeble, unreliable and dishonest. This, however, does not seem to have been always the case. The famous Bharata, the first emperor of India from whom the country takes its name Bharatam, was born of Dushyanta and Shakuntala in Gandharva.

Some commentators maintain that a proper ceremony is necessary to ratify the lawless union of the Gandharva partners before they can be considered properly married. But

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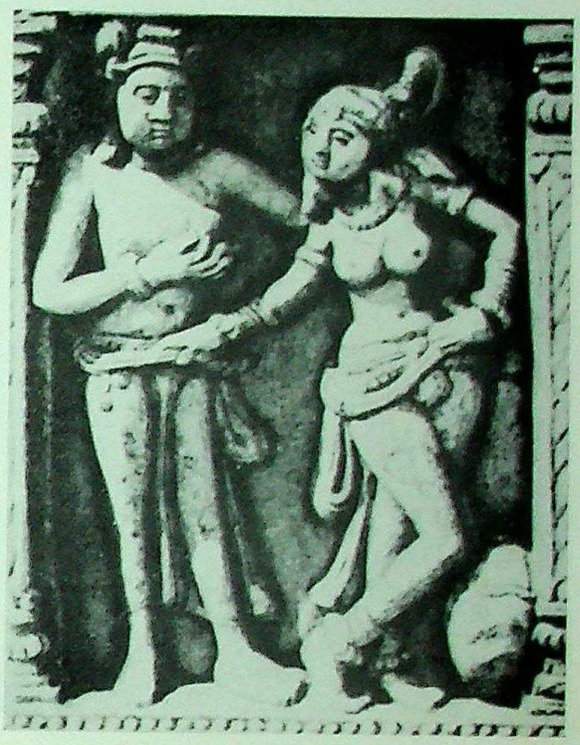
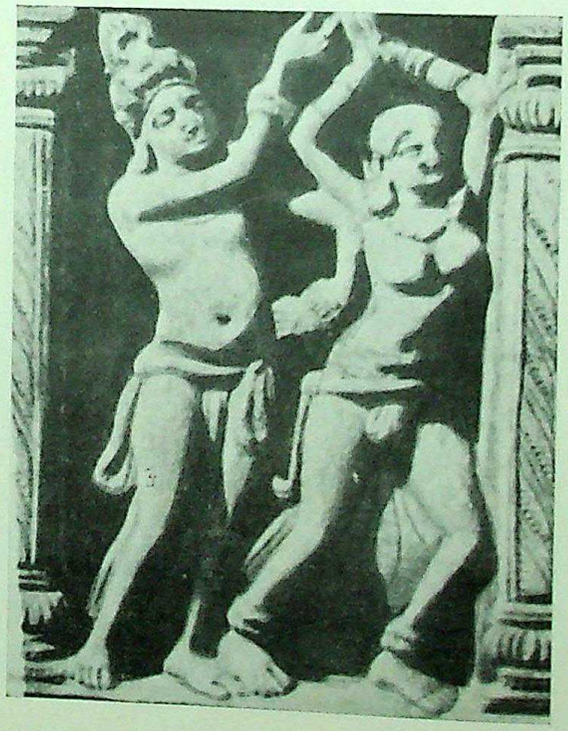
LOVER'S PROGRESS—I

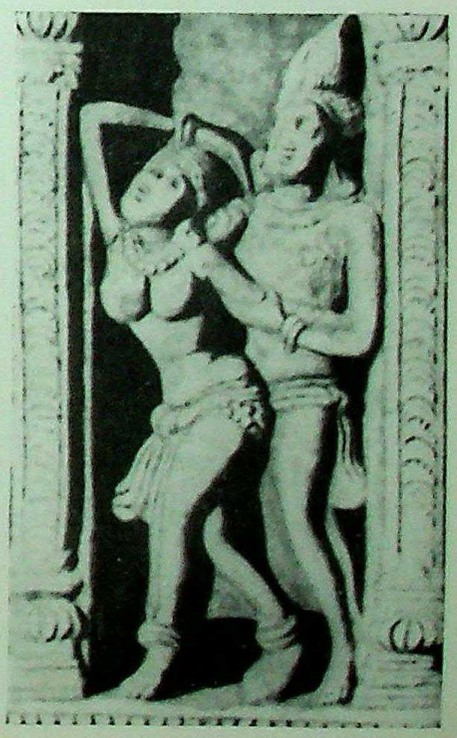
77 THE MEETING



78 THE APPROACH



79 SHE IS TAKEN ABACK AND ABOUT TO DEPART



80 SHE IS STOPPED

Nagarjunakonda, 2nd Century B. C.
Buddhist Antiquities

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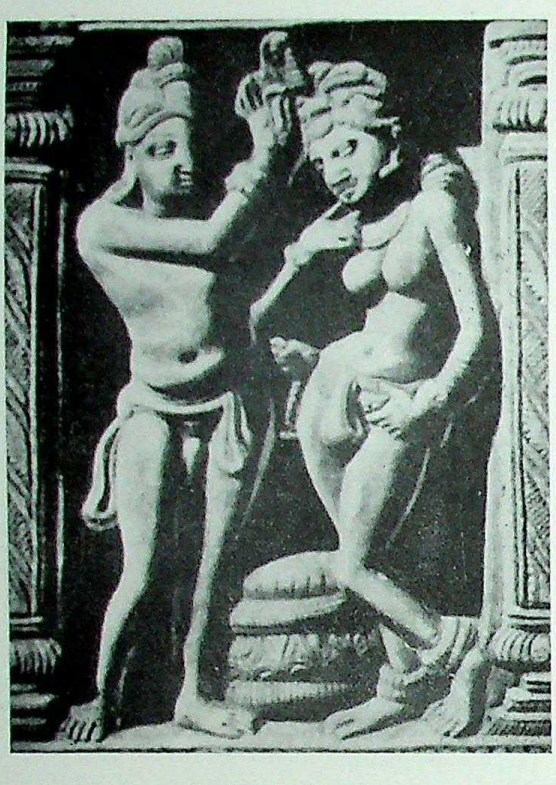
LOVER'S PROGRESS—2



81 THE PROPOSAL

82 SHE IS WON OVER

83 OFFER OF A DRINK

84 SHE IS NOW AMOROUS

Nagarjunakonda, 2nd Century B. C.
Buddhist Antiquities

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LOVER'S PROGRESS—3

85 BUT RESENTS LIBERTIES

86 A BIT OF COAXING

87 SHE IS HIS NOW

88 THE BLISS

Nagarjunakonda, 2nd Century B. C.
Buddhist Antiquities

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90 MAITHUN FIGURES
Puri, Orissa : 11th Century A. D.
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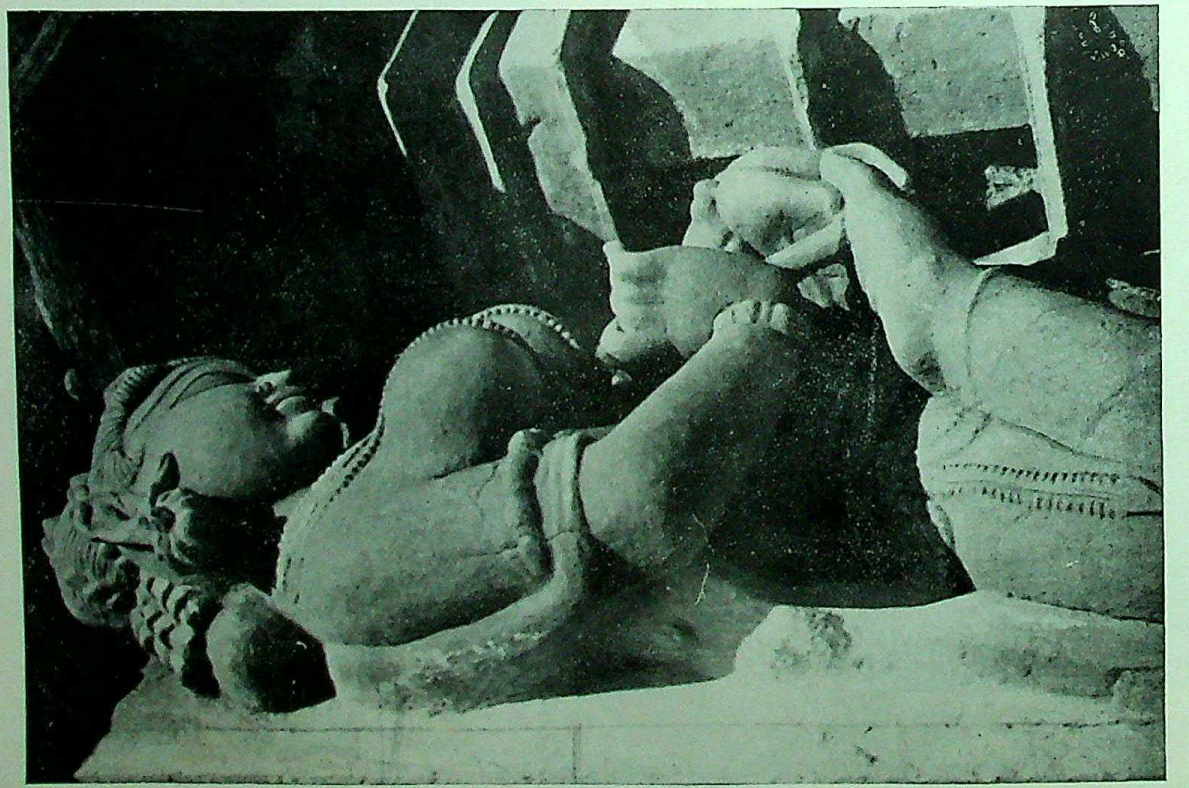

89 AN APSARA OR CELESTIAL BEAUTY ANOINTING HER FEET
Khajuraho : 11th Century A. D.
Photo : A. K. Banerji

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others point out an insurmountable obstacle to the proper performance of the ceremony. In a marriage ceremony of the orthodox form, a bride has always to be a virgin and in the case of two lovers who have already taken advantage of the Gandharva rite there is very little chance of the girl being a virgin.

Pisacha means 'devil' and Paisacha is its adjective. It is clear from the name that the law givers had no love for this form of marriage and they were forced to accept it as valid as they were left with no alternative. And they had good reason for their attitude. Paisacha is mere drugging and rape. The man doped the woman by drugs or intoxicants and while she was out of her senses took his pleasure with her. It may appear strange that a marriage should be considered valid under such circumstances. It was probably out of kindness to the woman that the law givers recognized this sort of rape as marriage, for a raped woman in Hindu society was an outcaste and her only chance of securing maintainance lay in forcing the ravisher to marry her.

The Rakshasa is marriage by capture. It is named after a powerful brood of demons called Rakshasas. This form of marriage was highly becoming of Kshatriyas in the epic age ; as we have seen, great heroes like Bhishma, Arjuna and Krishna approved of it and the last two married according to this form.

The Asura form, named after the Asuras or enemies of the gods, is bride purchase pure and simple on payment of an adequate sum. The bride price in this case is not a token gift of a pair of cattle as in the Arsha, but a sum varying according to the accomplishments and status of the bride. Many Aryan tribes practised this form of marriage especially on the north-west of India. As mentioned elsewhere princess Madri was bought on payment of a bride price to her brother.

It is noteworthy that the codes even though recognizing disreputable forms of marriage do not make any mention of Swayamvara, the pride of the Kshatriyas. Probably Brahminical vanity did not permit of the encouragement of this form of ancient pageantry of the Kshatriyas. Anyhow the institution persisted right down to the Muslim period and was given up only after the decay of the power of the Rajputs.

Of the eight forms of marriage, the Brahma is the only form widely practised among the Hindus at present. The Sarda Act having raised the age of marriage among girls and boys, some of these in modern India are taking an independent line in the matter of their marriages and Gandharva marriages are becoming fashionable among the better classes. They do not, however, go to extremes like Dushyanta and Shankuntala, but they do express their views in the matter of the choice of their mates, and parents often accede to their request. The Asura form is practised among certain communities. Buying a bride is, however, considered disreputable and those who indulge in it come in for a good measure of social censure. Buying of bridegrooms, on the other hand, is becoming exceedingly fashionable in Hindu society and we will have occasion to deal with this later.

The position of the widow in medieval India requires particular mention. We have seen that in ancient India a widow usually married her husband's brother. Even when actual marriage did not take place, the widow was permitted to bear children in levirate. The codes, however, prohibited the custom as sinful. According to the codes a respectable widow was to live in her husband's house as a nun, cherishing the memory of her lost spouse and observing the fasts and rites prescribed for such unfortunate women.

Some earlier law givers permitted the widow to beget children in levirate. Gautama, a liberal law giver lays down that "a woman whose husband is dead and who desires it may bear a son to her brother-in-law. Lacking a brother-in-law she may obtain offspring by cohabiting with a Sapinda, a Sagotra, a Samnapravara (all relatives) or one who belongs to the same caste". Again, a discarded wife, a woman whose husband had deserted

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her or was missing, had the right of re-marriage after waiting for a certain period. Manu, however, did not favour this view. According to him, a widow could not remarry because a woman was a gift given away to her husband, and 'the same thing cannot be given away twice'.

The followers of the codes were greater zealots than their authors, and many things not ordained in the codes were enforced by society. Sati was such an institution. Sati was the result of stretching the Hindu sacramental conception of marriage to the extreme. We have already referred to the sacred writ which lays down that a married woman has no life apart from her husband. It is only natural then that she should perish with her husband on the funeral pyre. Male jealousy also contributed substantially to the spread of the institution. In this matter kings were the worst culprits. They could not bear the thought of their beautiful women submitting themselves to the embraces of less worthy individuals. Herod the Great when he went to see Octavius, we know, passed secret orders to his trusted agent to put to death his wife Herodias in case he did not return from the fateful interview with the Roman conqueror. It was in this spirit that mighty Aryan princes of medieval India wished their women to perish with them. The Rajputs were the most ardent advocates of Sati. The Muslim invasion took a terrible toll of the Rajput women and the feminine population of whole cities perished in the horrible mass suicide known as Jauhar. The iconoclastic zeal of early Muslim invaders raised bitter feelings against them among the Hindus, and Hindu women often preferred suicide to capture and slavery.

The fashion set by princes soon spread among other classes too, and the Brahmins, Vaishyas and even some Sudras began to imitate royalty. Learned men found sacred texts to justify the institution. It is well known that the Vedas contain no trace of Sati and that they afford no sanction to the practice. But an enterprizing scholar changed the word 'Agre' into 'Agne' in a Vedic verse and obtained the much sought for Vedic sanction for Sati. The practice became such a fashion among the Hindus that even the Sikhs to whom Sati is prohibited encouraged it, and on the death of Maharajah Ranjit Singh four of his queens mounted the funeral pyre.

The Saktas, worshippers of female deities, and other enlightened Hindus had revolted against the practice from very early times. Bana, the well known author of *Kadambari* wrote in the 7th century A.D.: "To die after one's beloved is most fruitless. It is a custom followed by the foolish. It is a mistake committed by infatuation. It is a reckless course followed only on account of hot haste. It is a mistake of stupendous magnitude. It does no good whatsoever to the dead person. It does not help him in ascending to heaven; it does not prevent him from sinking into hell. It does not at all ensure union after death; the person who has died goes to the place determined by his own Karman, the person who accompanies him on the funeral pyre goes to the hell reserved for those who are guilty of the sin of suicide. On the other hand, by surviving the deceased, one can do much good both to oneself and to the departed by offering prescribed oblations for his happiness in the other world. By dying with him one can do good to neither."*

The *Tantras*, the scriptures of the Saktas, also denounce Sati. The *Mahanirvana-Tantra* expressly prohibits Sati and declares that a woman burning herself with her husband is sure to go to hell.

These views, however, did not obtain popular approval. The voice of the advocates of Sati was dominant in medieval India and both sacred and secular literature is full of panegyrics of Sati. It cannot be denied that there is something grand in a devotion that goads a person to commit suicide on the death of her mate, and the rite of Sati was extolled as the supreme expression of a woman's love for her husband and she was held up

* Quoted from *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation*, Dr. A. S. Altekar.

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as a goddess on earth. Some writers maintained that the law of Karma was inoperative in the case of Sati, and even a dissolute woman could obtain eternal bliss if she would but mount the funeral pyre of her husband. The lawgiver Parasara maintained that a Sati was so powerful that she could challenge the powers of the prince of the nether regions and forcibly take her husband out of hell if he happened to be there. A Sati proceeding to the site of the awesome rite was believed to be capable of bestowing eternal bliss on any mortal she cared to look at.

With such exaltation of Sati, it is not surprising that a large number of widows voluntarily burnt themselves to death on the funeral pyres of their husbands. There have been cases in which the most sincere persuasion of relatives failed to dissuade women from their determination to become Satis.

On the other hand there were incidents on record in which unwilling women were forced to become Satis. A widow was considered a curse to herself and to her relatives, and many widows became Satis as an escape from the wretchedness which otherwise would be in store for them ; those who preferred a miserable life to death were at times coaxed by their relatives to perish in the flames. Some relatives were even actuated by a desire to put themselves in possession of the wealth of the widow and brought much pressure upon her to take the short cut to heaven. Stories were also told of widows who, while trying to escape from the devouring flames, were held down by long poles by relatives and thus consigned to the fire.

The Muslims tried to abolish Sati, but they could only control it. The magistrate of every district during the Muslim period had to satisfy himself that no coersion was employed in the matter of Sati in places under his jurisdiction, and as such every widow had to apply to him in person for a permit before committing herself to the flames. The granting of permits, however, became more or less formal, and the institution flourished unchecked till the year 1829 when it was stopped by Lord William Bentinck at the instance of Hindu reformers of whom particular mention must be made of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, that pioneer of modernism in India.

The abolition of Sati did not, however, immediately raise the position of widows. Their lot, if anything, became more pitiable. There was a widespread Hindu notion that the death of a man was mysteriously brought about by the sins of his wife, and the widow was more or less considered a murderess and treated as such. She lived in the house of her dead husband and the relatives of this person viewed her as the prime cause of their bereavement.

On the death of the husband the head of the widow was shaved and she was subjected to a rigorous course of persecution. In some provinces it was customary to drag her on the day of her husband's death to a riverside or other water front, and abuse and beat her as an atonement for her sins. After this persecution she was expected to live an ascetic life. She was prohibited from eating nutritive food and wearing fine clothes or ornaments. The drudgery of the house fell to her lot. She was not permitted to visit a household on festive occasions as her presence forboded evil. Married women kept out of her way lest her sight should bring them widowhood.

The tragedy was the more pitiable when the widow subjected to this treatment happened to be a girl in her teens or a child. She had probably no love for her husband as marriage was contracted before she came of age, and the sense of blighted youth gave occasion for much heart break and even immoral practices. Seduction of young widows was an easy matter, and some were abandoned by the seducers to the brothels.

From this depth of medieval degradation Hindu women have risen very high indeed as we shall see in the next chapter.

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Chapter Five

WOMEN IN MODERN INDIA

The modern phase in Hindu social development may be said to have started with the British occupation of India. The Muslim conquest did bring about certain changes in Hindu society ; but these were mainly confined to the religious sphere and to some extent to the caste system. As far as women were concerned, the Muslim influence only contributed to their further degeneration from the very low position they had been then occupying in Hindu society. Medieval Muslims were strict observers of the Purdah and they thought women's freedom was incompatible with sound morals. Hence respectable women were seldom permitted to go out of doors. When necessity demanded their moving out of their houses, elaborate precautions were taken to prevent temptation. Women of the nobility, while moving out, were secluded from public gaze by a portable enclosure manned by eunuchs. When the royal harem was on the move, males were chased away for miles around the area by which the camp moved. The middle classes, for obvious reasons could not afford such a costly system of seclusion, and for their benefit was invented the Burkha, or the veil covering a lady from the crown of the head to the tip of the toes, without wearing which no Muslim lady with any claim to modesty could walk about the streets in medieval India.

When the Muslim domination of the country became more or less complete, the Hindus, in imitation of their masters, adopted the Purdah. The princes, especially in the north, copied the Muslim custom in its entirety, and 'the Zenana' of Rajput princes even excelled that of the Moguls in strictness, privacy and membership. Middle class Hindu ladies did not wear the Burkha when they moved out of doors, but they covered their heads and faces with their Saris which effectively served the purpose of the veil. The only free women in medieval India were the very poor and courtesans.

With the decay of the Muslim power and the arrival of the British, there was some change for the better. The servants of the East India Company were not, it is true, fired by any religious or humanitarian zeal, and they did nothing consciously to bring about social progress among the Hindus. Their main interest in the country was in exploiting it, and the methods they employed were not always above censure. A good many of the Company's servants were adventurers or common rogues who found life at home too prosaic, and the Indians who moved among them and had occasion to study their way of life often spoke of them as a sort of devils from some remote region. There were, however, a few noble Englishmen who came to India with truly missionary zeal and wished to do something for the progress of the country. But more than the efforts of these, the contact the British adventurers opened between India and Europe was responsible for the changes that took place in Hindu society. Intelligent Indians travelled abroad and were struck by the structure of European society, especially by the comparative freedom the women of Europe enjoyed. These enlightened men and women came back to India bursting with reforming zeal, and in course of time their number and influence increased. Of these pioneers, mention must be made of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, generally known as the Father of Modern India, and of Pundita Ramabai, a gifted Indian lady who laboured all her life for the emancipation of her sisters. Readers interested in the origin and progress of the femininist movement in India will do well to read Pundita Ramabai's interesting little book, *The High Caste Hindu Woman*, published towards the close of the nineteenth century.

Before dealing with the femininist movement, we shall summarize the handicaps women in India were suffering before the British occupation of the country. Sati was common among the ruling classes and the Brahmins. The widows who did not submit themselves to the cruel custom were ill-treated by society ; their heads were shaved, and they were shunned as ill-omen and given the drudgery of the house to work out their

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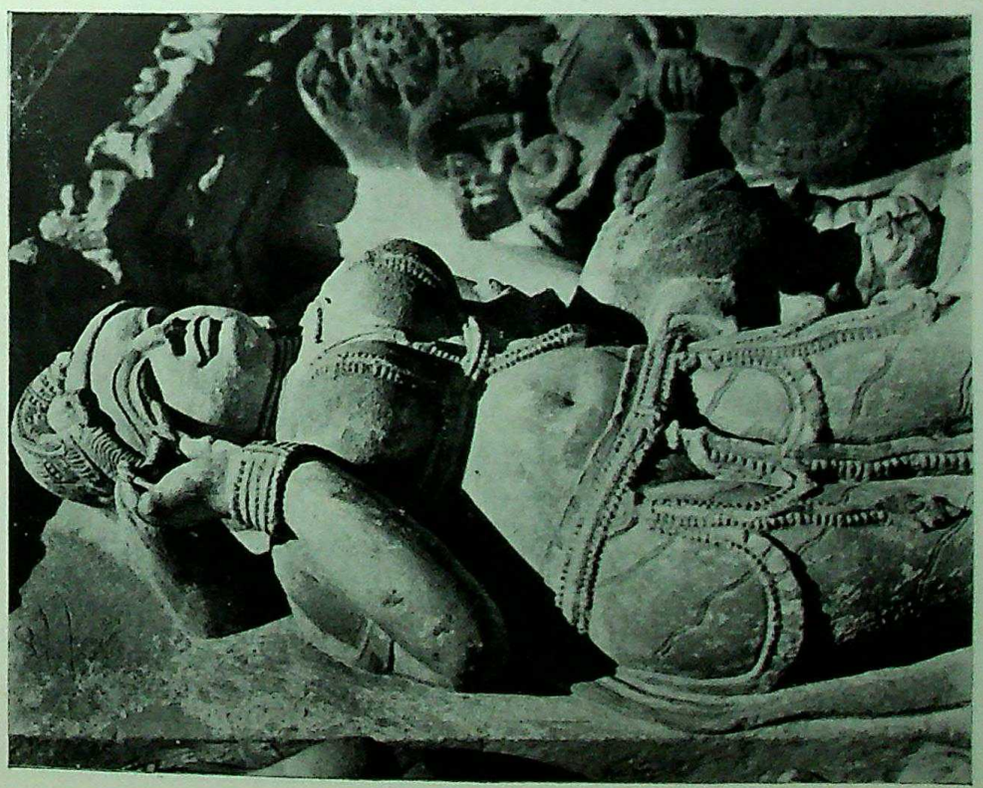
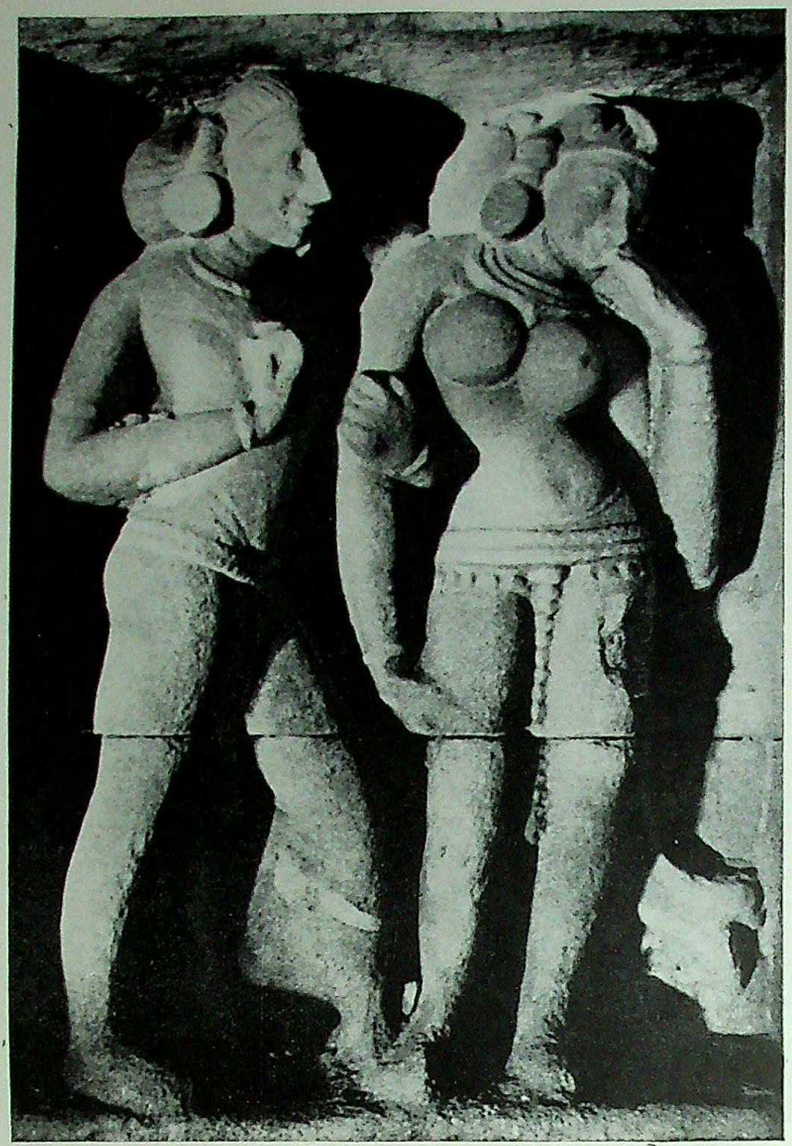
92 A DANCER IN A PECULIAR POSE
Belur, Mysore : 12th Century A. D.
Photo : A. K. Banerji



91 AN APSARA OR CELESTIAL BEAUTY PAINTING HER EYES
Khajuraho : 11th Century A. D.
Photo : A. K. Banerji

पुस्तकालय
गुरुकुल काँगड़ी



93 COURTING
Bhuvanesvar, Orissa : 10th Century A. D.

94 LOVERS
Rajarani Temple, Bhuvanesvar, Orissa : 10th Century A. D.

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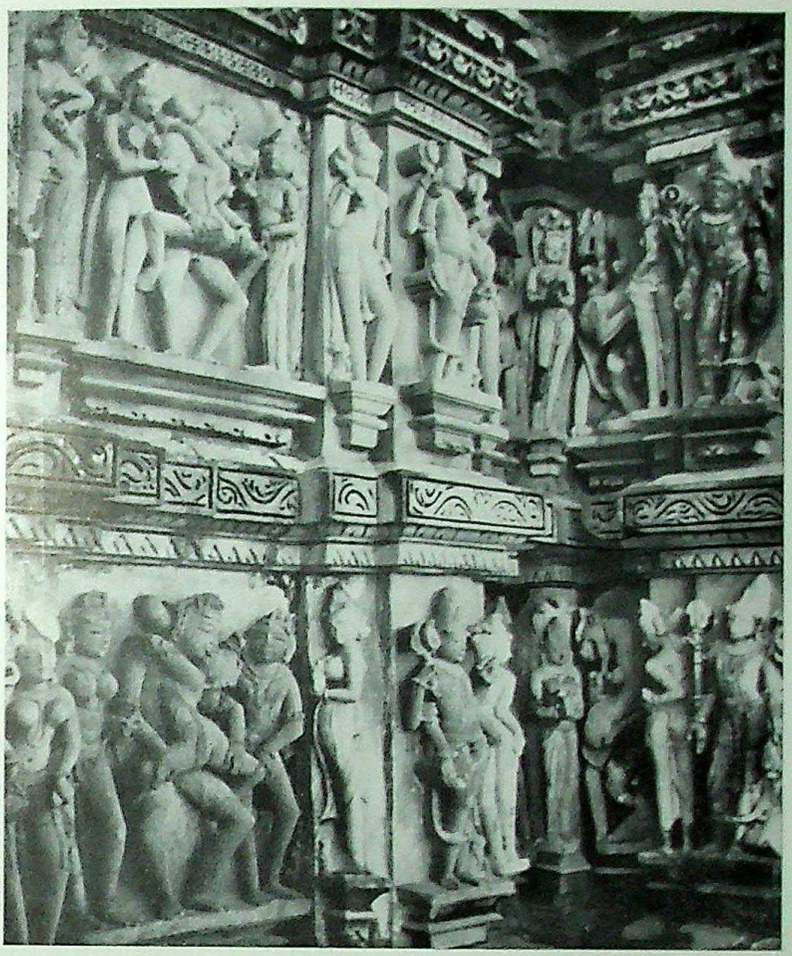

95 DETAILS, KHAJURAHO TEMPLE SCULPTURES

Photo : P. Braham

96 THE FAMOUS TEMPLES OF KHAJURAHO

Home of Kama, the love god, and of his enemy, Shiva, the ascetic : 11th Century A. D.

Photo : Hebbar

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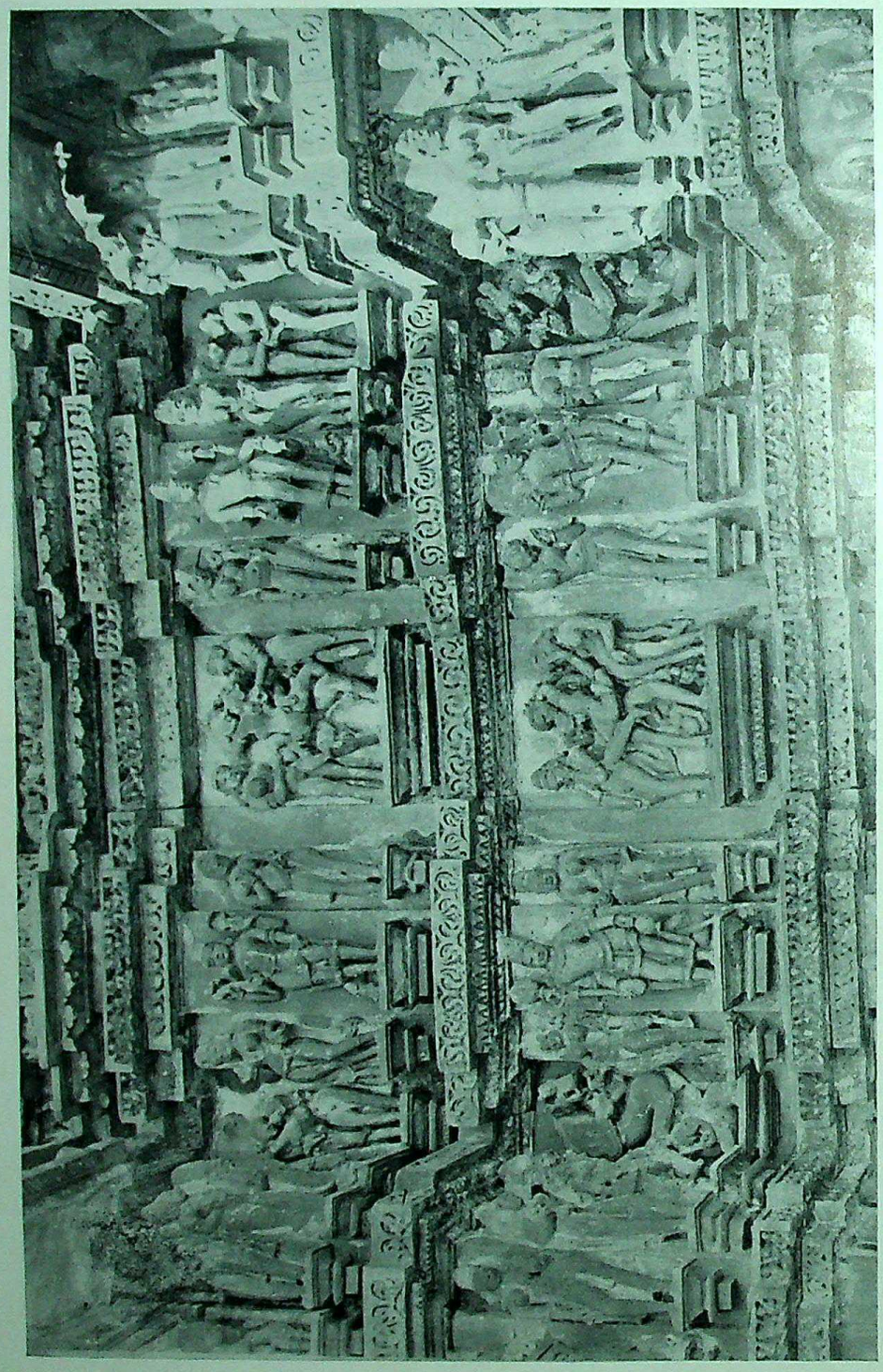

97 DETAILS OF SCULPTURES ON THE NORTH FACADE
Between oriel windows, Lakshmana Temple, Khajuraho : 11th Century A. D.
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salvation through hard labour. Child marriage was the rule in all the three higher castes and among the majority of well-to-do Sudras. Kings, nobles and blue-blooded Brahmins, in fact, all those who could afford it practised polygyny ; polyandry was unknown except among some insignificant hill tribes. Respectable women were secluded from all public activities, and a knowledge of letters was denied to them. She was, more or less, a chattel of her husband.

The first important step towards the liberation of Hindu women was taken by those enlightened Hindus who, headed by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, agitated for the abolition of Sati by law. The British were first neutral, especially officialdom, their fear of disturbing the Indian bee-hive from which they were extracting honey dominating all their actions when dealing with the social or religious problems of the Hindus. But enlightened public opinion in India and the voice of certain well-meaning Englishmen were too strong for those in power, and in the year 1829 Lord William Bentinck the then Governor-General of India took a bold step and prohibited Sati by law. Orthodox Hindus did not keep quiet. They maintained that the legislation was a wanton Christian interference with their sacred right to burn their women alive, and fought their case in the Privy Council. But their petition was dismissed and Sati soon became a thing of the past.

The abolition of Sati did not, however, bring about an immediate improvement in the condition of the widow. On the other hand, it was thought meritorious to torture the widow as her husband's death was mysteriously traced to her own sins. It was even considered irreligious to show pity or kindness towards the widow. Suffering was believed to lead to expiation of her sins and bring peace to her soul.

Gradually the spread of education and modern notions of marriage began to bring about a change in this medieval attitude towards the widow. Public opinion in this respect became sufficiently enlightened to give legal recognition to widow marriage. Few Hindus, however, took immediate advantage of this piece of legislation. In course of time, the more intelligent Hindu widows who were bold enough to ignore the sentiments of the orthodox and wealthy enough to be independent of their relatives began to think that there was no point in living in life-long mourning for departed husbands to whom they were married before they reached the age of discretion. The more enlightened members of the community supported this view and even put forward sacred texts in defence of their views. With all their efforts, it must be admitted, few Hindu widows remarry especially if they have become mothers. There is such a strong sentiment against widow marriage in Hindu society that even the Arya Samajists, an avowed sect of reformers, do not approve of marriage of widows other than virgins whose husbands have died before consummation of marriage. The idea of a woman submitting herself to the embraces of another man after her husband's death, in or out of wedlock, is thoroughly revolting to the Hindu, and reform in this direction goes at a very slow pace even in modern India. Widow marriage is at present mainly confined to those ladies who are socially and economically independent of their orthodox relatives, and intellectually bold enough to ignore the threats of punishments held out to sinners in the kingdom to come.

In the matter of the treatment meted out to widows, the position has considerably changed for the better. Although among some village communities the old ideas of persecution still persist, the general tendency at present is to treat the widow as an object of pity. Tonsure, so humiliating to Hindu women, is not now enforced on widows except among some very orthodox castes in southern India ; even here it is confined to elderly widows, young widows being allowed to grow their hair. No widow, young or old, is, however, expected to wear bright coloured vestments or ornaments, and this convention is still widely respected.

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From the very start of the British occupation of the country, there has been a slow but effective process of woman's emancipation through the spread of female education which has now yielded astounding results and has removed most of the disabilities of women among the better classes of the Hindus. And in this sphere the spade work done by the tireless women missionaries of England and America must be recognized. The conscience of enlightened India was sufficiently awakened when these noble workers started their labours. It is true that some of them were inspired by a desire to convert the "heathen"; but their efforts have been none the less beneficial. The schools they started for female education soon set an example for the rest to follow, and progressively minded Hindus themselves started schools for the education of girls. At first these schools were meant exclusively for the education of girls, as the idea of mixed education was considered revolutionary at that time. As soon as the prejudice against women's education was overcome, it was widely recognized that the existing institutions for the exclusive education of women would not quench the newly risen feminine thirst for knowledge. And then many men and women began to think that there could not be much harm if women attended schools where boys were also taught provided seats were set apart for girls. Thus mixed education has become fairly general in India, and the present ratio of school going girls to boys is about one to four. The percentage of girls attending schools compared to the total population of women in India is, no doubt, still low, but this is due to the low level of literacy obtaining in the country.

An impetus to women's education was given by the Sarda Act of 1929 which prohibited the marriage of girls below the age of fourteen. When girls were married in childhood little attention could be given to their education; besides, as already stated, a knowledge of letters was considered unbecoming of a girl coming from a respectable family. Once this prejudice was overcome, the only thing parents could do to keep girls out of mischief was to send them to school. Moreover, a knowledge of letters has now come to be looked upon as an accomplishment and educated young men refuse to marry illiterate girls. The present tendency in the upper and middle classes is to look for brides who are well educated in their own mother tongue and have a smattering of English; among the modern respectable classes the passing of the matriculation examination is considered a necessary qualification in a marriageable girl. In the cities and towns this has become more or less the rule, and the villages are slowly falling into line. The difficulty in the villages is the absence of educational facilities. The village communities, usually very orthodox, fight shy of sending their daughters to hostels and boarding houses in cities.

At present no Hindu worth the name considers a knowledge of letters harmful to women. Higher education for women is not, however, quite popular among the orthodox who are inclined to believe that women by their very nature and physique are unsuited for strenuous work, physical or intellectual, and that the ultimate object of a woman's life is motherhood or housekeeping. But a large number of modern Hindus think otherwise, and quite a number of Hindu women have taken to higher professional studies and done well in medicine, law and politics. In medicine especially women have found a profession congenial to their genius and temperament.

With a knowledge of letters, feminine interest in the twin accomplishment of music and dancing is also increasing. These arts were condemned to courtesans in medieval India, but the prejudice in this respect has now been sufficiently overcome to make the arts popular among girls of respectable households. The revival of classical dancing and music, the patronage extended to fine arts by some of the greatest men of India like the late Rabindranath Tagore, and the instruction in dancing given in various centres of culture like Shantiniketan have led to a large number of cultured Indians sending their young daughters to well known institutions for instruction in the ancient arts of India. These

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young ladies and their patrons have brought about a revolutionary outlook among the Hindus in the matter of the respectability of singing and dancing, and today knowledge of dancing and music is considered a necessary accomplishment of a cultured lady. Young Hindu ladies, during social functions often give performances in dancing for the amusement of guests and some have even taken to dancing as a profession without lowering their social status. A good number of respectable Hindu ladies have also taken to the films as a career, a field which uptil recently was the exclusive preserve of the courtesan. All this has not dragged down the moral standard of the respectable as was feared by the orthodox, but has raised the standard and status of musicians, actors and dancers.

Apart from the few women who have taken to the lucrative professions and careers mentioned above, there are a large number of Indian women, engaged in the minor professions, making a living by working as typists, school mistresses, clerks and nurses. In fact women workers of these categories have become quite numerous and their interest in such jobs is so steadily increasing that the males have come to look upon women's demand for jobs of this nature as an evil. The present male objection is not inspired by ethical or moral considerations but advanced on purely economic grounds ; men fear that if women are encouraged to take up these jobs, a time will shortly come when a large number of men will be found living, without work, on the mercy of their wives and sisters.

During the days of the Indian Home Rule movement, Hindu women gave up their age old notions of modesty and many of them discarding the Purdah came out of their homes and took an active part in the political struggle of the country. A large number of them broke laws, spoke in public in defiance of bans, led processions, picketted liquor shops, and some of them were arrested and jailed. When during certain periods mass arrests of male leaders left the Congress without masculine leadership, women took up the leadership of the struggle on themselves and the way some of them conducted the non-co-operation movement elicited the admiration of even their opponents. The struggle for freedom gave Hindu women rare opportunities for showing their talents and ability, and their menfolk were quite surprised to note what their wives and daughters were capable of doing. The most remarkable thing in this connection was that no orthodox Hindu ever dared to raise his voice against this political activity of the women ; if anything, all sang the praises of the daughters of India.

The change in outlook brought about by this partial emancipation of women has affected the institution of marriage among the Hindus. Of the eight forms of marriage prevalent in medieval India, the most common form current at present is the Brahma or a modification of it. The Vedic ceremony, described in chapter II, is still performed among the orthodox with certain alterations. The ceremony usually takes place in the bride's house, the bridegroom and his party going to her place on the appointed day.

In the matter of marriage, the orthodox procedure at present is for a man to seek a husband for his daughter as soon as she comes of age to be married. Now, it is a delicate task for a person to go to a respectable householder and ask if his son would care to marry his daughter. As a matter of fact, a parent need not exert himself in the matter. Every Indian village or town has its professional match-makers, usually old Brahmins, elderly widows or impecunious men with a disinclination for hard work but a love for wandering. These professional match-makers keep themselves well acquainted with the age, looks, accomplishments and social and financial status of all the young men and women of the area in which they operate, and even before a girl comes of age to be married bring in proposals of marriage. They are privileged persons, have access to the women's apartments of even orthodox households and work upon the vanity of the womenfolk who have a considerable say in all matrimonial proposals.

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Once the parents decide to get their daughter married, they consider the match-maker's proposals with attention and when they have no particular choice of their own, select one of the offers. Then they send the party concerned, through the match-maker of course, definite proposals of marriage. After both parties have ascertained each other's willingness to consider the proposal, the match-maker is superseded by abler persons. The family priest or astrologer, or a common friend of both families now works as an intermediary. The horoscopes of the bride and bridegroom are consulted, genealogies of the families checked up, and the question of dowry settled. The last named is a very important item of the marriage contract among most of the communities ; among some sub-castes it is about the only item, they having grown above the superstitions connected with horoscopes and genealogy. We shall presently come to this modern development of commercialism in the sacred institution of marriage.

The raising of the marriageable age by the Sarda Act and the spread of female education have brought into play in modern Hindu communities a factor unknown in medieval India. This new factor is love. Young men and women nowadays have plenty of opportunities to meet each other, and co-education, especially in high schools and colleges, has led to social contact between marriageable boys and girls. This modern development together with the influence of Western notions of love and marriage, is leading to many instances of the Gandharva form of marriage, condemned by medieval legislators but praised as highly desirable by Kalidasa, Vatsyayana and other ancient writers. Intelligent parents often accede to the desire of the young people in love, and a girl's parents usually heave a sigh of relief if the boy she loves happens to be of the same caste and the marriage is not likely to lead to social complications. But unfortunately love does not always respect the laws of society. Hindu girls sometimes fall in love with men of lower caste or even with Christians, Muslims or Parsis, and such inter-communal or inter-caste marriages are held in abhorence by the orthodox who desire that their women should always marry above their caste and status.

A peculiarity in Hindu social conceptions makes the marriage of girls below their caste or outside their community extremely unpopular. Where their women are concerned, the Hindus suffer from an inferiority complex. A man who marries a girl is considered, by virtue of his marriage, superior to the girl's male relatives. Hence a Christian, Muslim, Parsi or low caste Hindu who marries a high caste Hindu girl becomes, by the marriage, the superior of the girl and her relatives, a position few Hindus will like to put up with. So deep rooted is this prejudice that the word 'Sala' meaning one's wife's brother, has become a term of abuse in India. The idea is that a man who has another man's sister living in his house, even in wedlock, is her lord and indirectly of her brother. Hence a modern Hindu who has no objection to inter-communal marriages in principle will think it a humiliation if his daughter or sister marries below her caste or outside her community. Girls too subscribe to this prejudice and very few of them take the extremely bold step of involving themselves in such marriages even if they happen to fall in love with men of unmixable communities. In the case of men, however, the prejudice does not obtain and Hindu boys often marry Christian, Muslim, Parsi or low caste Hindu girls without raising much social censure.

In the case of inter-communal marriages parents and their daughters often fall out, especially where the parents happen to be orthodox, and the marriage, because of the social and religious complications, are performed in Civil Registries. For obvious reasons only those individuals of independent means who can afford to ignore the sentiments of their relatives and the purse of their parents take advantage of the Civil Marriage Act.

Such marriages are, however, exceptional and confined to the ultra modern section of the community. The vast majority of enlightened Hindus consult their sons and daugh-

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ters before marriage, and usually a happy mean between the extreme individuality of love and the dead weight of superstitions is arrived at. Anyway, a desirable social convention is gaining ground among the educated classes of Hindus that the consent of the girl and the boy should be obtained before a marriage proposal is finally accepted. Among the orthodox who follow the old codes, especially in the villages, it is even now considered improper for parents to consult their sons or daughters in their marriage affairs or for the young people to express any view whatever in the matter.

We have mentioned elsewhere that the dowry is tending to become an important item in the marriage contract. In ancient India, as we have already noticed, there were certain communities among whom girls were given in marriage on receiving a bride price. This custom has now fallen into disrepute among the better classes of Hindus, although it still obtains among some of the lower castes. It is however clandestinely practised by wealthy men of middle age who wish to marry pretty young girls whose parents happen to be poor. But among the modern Hindus of the upper classes the general tendency is to buy bridegrooms on payment of exorbitant sums of money. This buying of bridegrooms is called 'the dowry system' in modern India.

The origin of the system can be traced to the phrase 'having decked her' found in the codes in connection with the giving away of the bride in the Brahma and Prajapatya forms of marriage. In ancient days decking the bride was a minor item in marriage. After a marriage had been arranged giving due consideration to the caste, social status and the general compatibility of the contracting parties, the father of the bride decked her with what ornaments and clothes he could afford, and these after marriage formed the property of the bride. In those days it was bad form for the bridegroom's father to specify the actual price and nature of the ornaments. Modern commercialism, however, has thoroughly vitiated this ancient institution. Before a marriage proposal is accepted, the bridegroom's party now demands a specification of ornaments, clothes and utensils the bride's father is expected to give her and in addition demand a large amount in cash as a payment to the bridegroom for the trouble of marrying the girl. In certain communities the amount of dowry is the deciding factor in marriage, good looks and accomplishments of the bride, and even considerations of caste and social status often being overlooked in favour of a good amount in cash.

The institution flourishes on the inexplicable passion of the Hindu to marry his daughters above his status. This leads to several parties offering large sums of money to a young man of promise hailing from a good family, and the bridegroom is often put up to a sort of auction by his parents. While the vice is fairly general among all Hindus, certain communities like the Amils of Sind and the Brahmins of South India trade on it unscrupulously. Among these communities sons are looked upon as a commercial asset to the family and daughters as a liability : one more reason why a Hindu fervently prays for sons in preference to daughters. Many Hindus ruin themselves by providing exorbitant dowries to their daughters, and on this account even those who do not believe in the religious advantage of having sons dread the birth of daughters.

In the matter of marriage modern middle class Hindus often show a preference for young men in public service to those engaged in business or agriculture. A young man in service getting a pittance of say Rs. 100/- a month is preferred to a business man with an annual income of Rs. 12,000 and commands a larger price in the marriage market. The joint family system prevailing among the generality of Hindus, especially among the trading and agricultural communities, is mainly responsible for the preference for men in public service as sons-in-law. The plight of a Hindu girl married into a household following the joint family system is anything but enviable. She lives with a dozen other women

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under the tyranny of her old, impossible mother-in-law.* A young man employed in public service or in some well-known firm in a city often breaks away from the joint family, and is permitted by convention to set up his own house where he works and can take his wife with him. Here the young lady is mistress of her own home and lives much more happily than her sisters-in-law in the joint family. Educated girls find life in the joint family too much of a burden and wish to set up their own homes after marriage, and they often bring pressure on their parents directly or indirectly to get them married to men working away from the joint family. Parents too are keenly aware of this advantage and try to bring about a marriage of this nature for their daughters.

It may well be asked why the joint family system is not done away with, if it is so much disliked by all. The answer is that it is slowly dying, but changes in India take place very gradually except, of course, in politics. Besides, the joint family system has certain economic advantages, and the old school clings to it with all the tenacity of conservatism.

The modern awakening of women throughout the world has also contributed considerably towards the emancipation of women in India. Hindu women have found that their disabilities are not merely social or economic but political as well and several enlightened women think that the time has come for them to demand political equality with men. The first demand for enfranchisement of women in India was made by the All-India Women's Deputation that waited upon Mr. Montague on 18th Dec. 1918. The deputation consisted of both Hindu and Muslim women and the gist of their demand was that women should be given all the political rights enjoyed by men as far as suffrage was concerned.

In those days, however, to enfranchise women was considered a dangerous move as women were thought politically irresponsible, and the provisions of the Government of India Bill introduced in the British Parliament in 1919 were not quite satisfactory to Indian women. Another deputation of Indian women gave evidence before the Joint Select Committee of both houses of parliament appointed to reduce the provisions of the bill to a workable basis. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Mrs. Annie Beasant and Miss Herabai Tata were heard by the Committee as the representatives of the progressive group of Indian women who demanded the extension of the franchise to women.

These efforts of women suffragists did not bring about immediate results. A cautious policy was pursued by the Government and the Electoral Rules of Indian Franchise were so framed as to give the provincial legislatures power to extend the franchise to women if they thought the move advisable. Even this grudging concession to the fair sex was to be made only after ten years, as it was presumed that it would take at least a decade for the most progressive women to catch up with their menfolk in political maturity.

Madras, however, took a bold step and enfranchised women. The heavens did not fall as was feared, and other provinces took up Madras' lead; and Indians were agreeably surprised to see that their women were not so politically dull as they had imagined. Women members had to be nominated to legislatures in the beginning, but soon they began to win seats in open competition with men and some of them showed more political wisdom than their male compeers. The number and quality of women politicians are now steadily on the increase and with the coming of political independence some of the most coveted positions in the administrative and diplomatic services of the country have been adorned by women.

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* For a full description of life in the joint family, please see *Hindu Religion, Customs and Manners* by P. Thomas (Taraporevala).

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Mention must here be made of that pioneer women's origanisation in India, the All-India Women's Conference. The organisation was founded on the initiative of Mrs. Margarette Cousins in 1926 and the first session of the Conference met in January 1927. The main object of the early organizers was to work in the field of education, but soon the scope of activities was widened to include the social and political sphere. It became a powerful organisation with branches in almost all the principal cities of India, ceaselessly working for the removal of the economic, social, educational, legal and political disabilities of the women of India.

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PART TWO

WOMAN : HER NATURE AND POWER

Chapter Six

THE NATURE OF WOMAN

In the Hindu attitude towards women two opposing tendencies are discernible. The Saktas, as we shall see in a later chapter, have deified woman and hold the view that the female is greater and nobler than the male. They speak of the fair sex as Devi or the goddess. A large section of the Hindus have tended to this view of woman, and in the epics, law books, and secular literature of India one often comes across panegyrics of women.

The ascetic and pessimistic ideals that dominate certain schools of Hindu thought have, on the other hand, inspired a literature which is not altogether complimentary to the fair sex. The universal male weakness for exaggerating the wiles of women has enriched this literature with fantastic tales of the wickedness of woman and her insatiable love of variety in the matter of sex experience. The infidelity of woman is a pet theme of the Eastern story teller and this theme from time immemorial has exercised a hold on popular imagination. Before coming to this view of women, I shall show the reader the brighter side of the picture.

We have seen that even so anti-femininist a work as the Code of Manu pays some glorious tribute to women. "Women," says the *Mahabharata*, "shall be worshipped, served and paid homage to. Offspring, wealth, and the prime joys of this earthly pilgrimage rise from women. They are the goddesses of happiness and beauty and must always be held in honour."

Murder of a woman is considered a crime more heinous than Brahmanicide, and no penance can expiate it. Even those books that extol human and animal sacrifice prohibit the slaughter of female victims. Instead of the pleasure of the deity the sacrifice of a female victim, we are told, brings divine wrath upon the world. The *Mahanirvana Tantra*, in the course of a discourse on the evil institution of Sati observes : "Every woman is a picture of the great goddess, and if a woman in her blindness climbs on to her dead lord's pyre, she then goes to hell."

A woman is considered by most lawgivers as essentially pure. Her periods are said to clean her of physical and spiritual impurities. Even an adulteress is believed to be clean after her menstrual flow. "A woman, a child and an old man are never unclean." Again, "a woman is pure in all her limbs, while the cow is pure only behind."

The *Mahabharata* thus stresses the tenderness and sweetness of woman :

Our love these sweetly speaking women gain ;
When men are all alone, companions bright,
In duty, wise to judge, and guide aright,
Kind, tender mothers in distress and pain.

Wife-beating, though permitted by some lawgivers, is prohibited by the Tantras. "If a man utters ill words to his wife," says the *Mahanirvana Tantra*, "he shall fast for a day ; if he hits her three."

The Hindus have always held the mother in great esteem and both their literature and practice emphasize the greatness of the mother. He is a miserable person indeed

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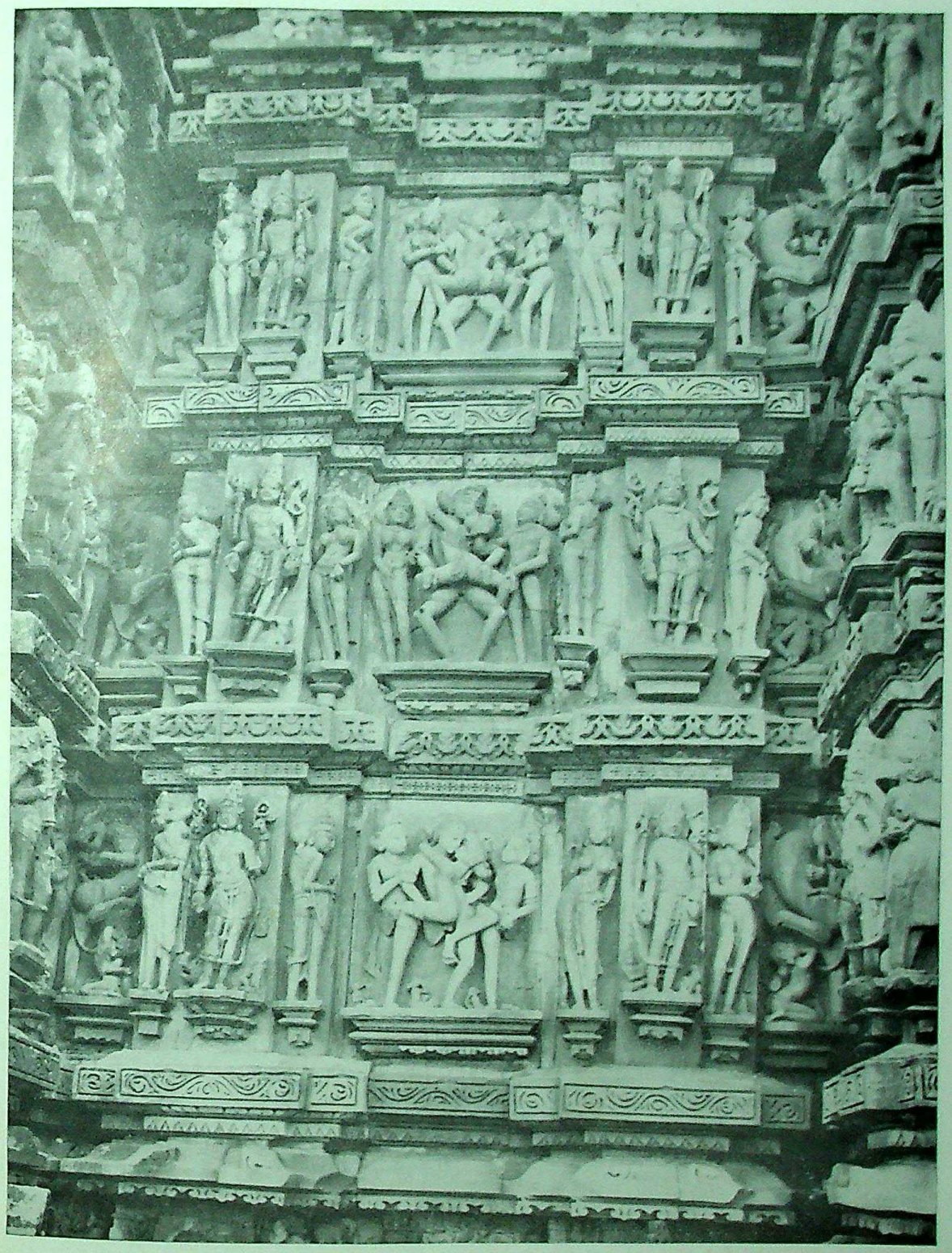

98 DETAILS OF SCULPTURES ON N. FACADE OF MAHAMANDAPA, KANDARYA MAHADEO TEMPLE
Khajuraho : 11th Century A. D.

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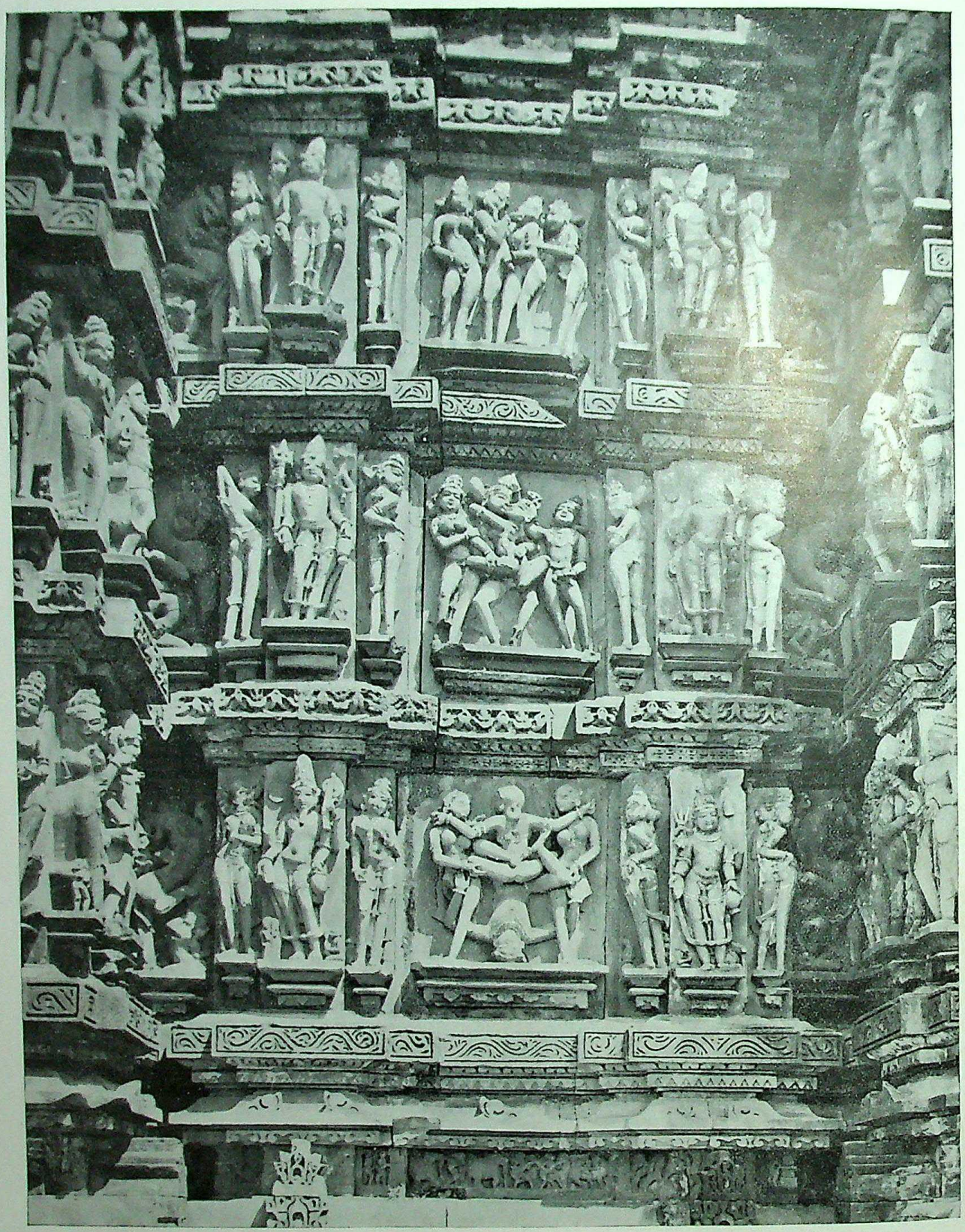

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100 A MEDALLION DEPICTING A LOVE SCENE
Badami Cave, Bijapur : 7th Century A. D.

101 A DANCING GIRL
Bhuvanesvar, Orissa: 10th Century A.D.
From Art of India & Ceylon, Smith

102 A MEDALLION DEPICTING A COUPLE
Badami Cave, Bijapur : 7th Century A. D.

103 A NAGA AND NAGINI
Badami, Bijapur : 7th Century A. D.

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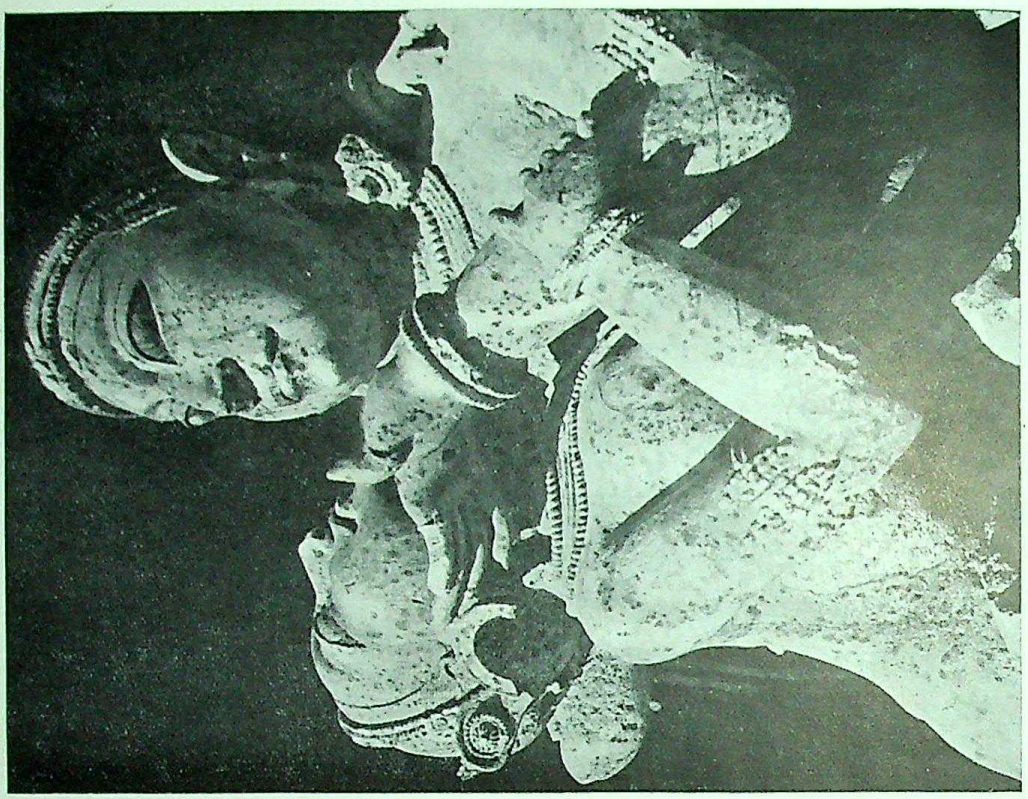

105 RAPTURE
Konarak, Orissa : 13th Century A. D.
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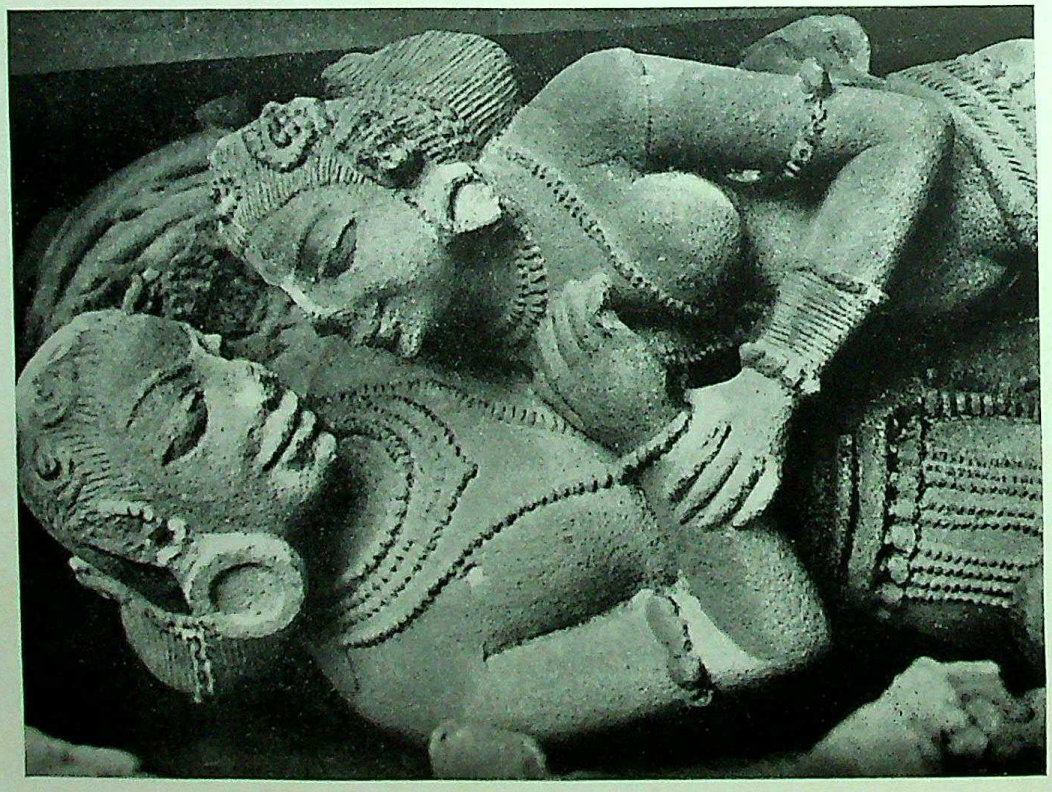

104 YOUNG LOVERS
Bhuvanesvar Orissa : 11th Century A. D.
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who would ill-treat his aged mother, and the respect for this time honoured sentiment often places a Hindu in a very unenviable position when his wedded wife and his old mother fall out, as often happens, in domestic matters. Usually in such situations a man, by his own sense of duty and by social codes, sides with his mother even at the cost of displeasure of his wife. A man who incurs the curses of his weak and aged father is not considered so lost to decency as one who brings upon himself the curses of his mother.

A matricide is an abandoned criminal among the Hindus. Yet a story is told of Parasurama, a deified Brahmin, who killed his mother to please his father under peculiar circumstances. Jamadagni, Parasurama's father, was a mighty sage whose wife Renuka was a virtuous lady. By the powers she attained through her whole-hearted devotion to her husband she could mould pots out of mud on the banks of the stream by which they lived and bake them by reciting a prayer. She used to take no jars when she went to the stream to fetch water but moulded and baked them on the spot. One day when she went to the stream she found a handsome young man bathing in the stream and entertained unholy thoughts in her mind and as a result the clay would not mould and bake. The distressed lady came back to the hermitage empty handed, unable to bring any water. Jamadagni divined the cause of her distress and was enraged. His five sons were not in the hermitage at the time and when they returned one by one, the holy man asked each of them to kill his wife. The four elder sons, revolted at the unnatural request, refused to kill Renuka and Jamadagni cursed them to become idiots. The youngest Parasurama, in obedience to his father's order, promptly cut off his mother's head. Jamadagni was so pleased with his son's devotion that he asked Parasurama to name a boon. The latter asked for his mother's revival and this was immediately granted.

The story was probably invented to emphasize the absolute authority of the father, a conception not very popular in the ancient world.

The tale of Shiratkaru and his mother is less gruesome. Shiratkaru, son of the sage Gautama, was so called because of his slow progress in everything he undertook. Gautama caught his wife Ahalya sinning and ordered Shiratkaru to kill her. The Slow Mover agreed to kill her, but started weighing the *pros* and *cons* of such a course of action; he took so long to convince himself that he would be right in killing his mother on the orders of his father that the latter changed his mind and let her live.

The status of the wife is almost as great as that of the mother. The Hindus consider marriage a religious duty. As the companion through the pilgrimage of life and as the mother of his sons, a man in theory holds his wife in great esteem. In practice it is true that the ideal has not always been realised. The classical literature of the Hindus extols the status and dignity of the wife in the most extravagant terms. 'The wife is the home,' says the *Rig Veda*. "He who unjustifiably forsakes his wife," observes a Tantric text, "shall put on an ass's skin and beg in seven houses with the words 'give alms to one that has left his wife'." A wife so forsaken is even allowed to consort with another man without being considered an adulteress.

Indiscriminate asceticism and celibacy are condemned in Hindu literature, though in exceptional cases both are permitted. A man has a duty to himself and to society. For the better discharge of this dual responsibility a person's life is divided into four Ashramas or stages. The first of these stages is the Brahmacharya or studentship during which period a man prepares himself by intensive study and discipline under a teacher for his later life. In the second stage called Grahastha he marries, sets up house and raises children for the propagation of his line. When his sons reach manhood, he is at liberty to leave his domestic affairs to them and abandon his home for a spiritual life. This stage is known as Vanaprastha when he prepares for the final stage of the drama, known as Sanyasa or

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renunciation, in which he cuts himself off from the world, repairs to a forest and leads a life of contemplation and asceticism till he ends his life.

Each of these stages is considered equally important for a full life and as such marriage and domestic life have a definite religious value for the Hindu. And the wife, who is an all-important partner in the second stage of a man's life, is highly spoken of in Hindu sacred literature. Says the *Mahabharata :*

The wife is half the man, his priceless friend ;
Of pleasure, virtue, wealth, his constant source ;
A help and stay along his earthly course ;
Through life unchanging, yea, beyond its end.
When racked by pain, by sickness worn,
By outrage stung, by anguish torn,
Disturbed, perplexed, oppressed, forlorn,
Men find their spouses' love and skill
The surest cure for every ill.*

The plight of the unhappy celibate is thus described :

The luckless wight who lacks a wife
And leads a doleful single life,
Should leave his home, and cheerless dwell
In some secluded forest dell.
And there should spend his days and nights
In fasting, penance, painful rites—
For now, without a helpmate dear,
His home is but a desert drear.
Who then would live without a wife—
His house's joy and light and life ?
With her the poorest hut will please
And want and toil be borne with ease.
Without her spacious gilded halls
Possess no charms—all splendour palls.

The ascetic, however, is not without his answer. For, "the wife is an all-devouring curse," says he. The fall of a good man through his wife and children is thus described : "Through blindness men fall into desire. Desire gives rise to anger, greed and selfishness. Self-seeking leads to works and works to bonds of love. Love sets in motion the cycle of births and deaths and the misery that is life. Life starts in the womb and is brought about by seed and blood mixed with excrement and water and fouled with the impurities of blood. Led on by the unquenchable thirst for life, miserable man is ever ensnared by woman who is the continuer of the web of life. Women are the ploughed field and men the seed ; women are bewitchers who bewilder the foolish and are the embodiment of lust. Therefore are children born out of lust. Just as lice that come out of our body are deemed unclean and foreign, so let the wise put away the vermin called children though they are born of their loins." †

* Tr. Muir.

† *Mahabharata.*

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Happily, these extreme views are not shared by the vast majority of the Hindus who find much good in married life and believe that children are a source of happiness in this world and in the next. But there is a general tendency among the Hindus, as among the rest of mankind who follow the patriarchal social system, to speak of women as fickle and unreliable. Their moral weakness is stressed in many books, though tales of devotion and fidelity are also many. Manu is particularly hard on women. According to this legislator, "it is in the nature of women to seduce men in this world ; for that reason the wise are never unguarded in the company of females. For women are able to lead astray in this world not only a fool but even a learned man, and to make him a slave of desire and anger. Women do not care for beauty, nor is their attention fixed on age ; thinking 'it is enough that he is a man', they give themselves to the handsome and to the ugly.

"Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however carefully they may be guarded in this world.

"Knowing their disposition, which the Lord of Creatures laid in them at the creation, to be such, every man should most strenuously exert himself to guard them.

" When Creating them, Manu allotted to women a love of their bed, of their seat and of ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct.

"For women no sacramental rite is performed with sacred texts, thus the law is settled ; women who are destitute of strength and destitute of knowledge of Vedic texts, are as impure as falsehood itself, that is the fixed rule." *

Pope's malicious view that every woman is a rake at heart is also shared by some Hindu writers. In the *Mahabharata* is a passage which claims to give an exposition of the true nature of woman. Sage Narada, that tireless enquirer after truth, wishing to know the fundamental nature of woman decided to get first hand information on the subject from a woman herself. With this purpose in view he approached the celestial dancer Pachasuda who revealed to him the true nature of woman in these words :

"Of a truth, there is nothing worse than woman in the three worlds. Women are the root of all evils. Even ladies of good family, beautiful and happily married do not observe the moral laws. They are ready to forsake their rich and worthy husbands and bestow their favours on others as soon as they get an opportunity. We, women, know no moral bars and are ever ready to throw ourselves into the arms of evil men. Women are not swayed by considerations of beauty, youth or character. Any man is good enough for a woman. Ladies of rank envy those fair ones who are in glorious youth and wander about free in sex wearing costly ornaments ; and women held in esteem often fasten themselves on to hunchbacks, fools, dwarfs, cripples and other detestable men. When women do not get any man, they even fall on one another.....The fire has never too many faggots, the ocean never too many rivers, the all-devouring time never too many beings, and a beautiful woman never too many men. Death, the storm, fire, poison, serpents, the sharpness of the sword, and hell itself—women are all these in one."

We are also told in the *Mahabharata* that originally there were no women in the world and men were reproduced by themselves alone. These sons of men were exceptionally pure and all went to heaven ; they crowded heaven to such an extent that the gods found themselves hard pressed for room. They then addressed a complaint to the Maker to find a way out, and Brahma then created women who very soon diverted the flow of souls from the earth to a region far removed from heaven.

* Tr : Buhler.

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Jealousy and a genius for quarrelling over petty things are said to be peculiar to women. The age old Hindu institution of polygyny is probably responsible for this view. The much married kings of ancient India usually had an "anger palace" in which an angry wife who had any grievance, fancied or otherwise, could occupy and demand redress. Much of the time of the husband of many women was wasted in settling quarrels between his wives. A jealous wife often had recourse to spells, charms and witchcraft when her husband failed to accede to her unreasonable demands. The *Atharva Veda* contains several spells for the destruction of rival wives, and one of the verses reads :

"The upper part of thy womb, I make the lower. Let there not be progeny to thee nor birth ; I make thee barren without progeny ; I make a stone thy cover."

The myths of Krishna, the husband of 16,008 wives, contain many amusing anecdotes about the jealousies and intrigues of his wives. The jealousy of his beloved Radha, the goddess of the love cult of the Hindus, forms the favourite theme of many works of high literary merit. Even highly placed ladies like Kunti, Draupadi and Kausalya were not above jealousy. Kunti was jealous of Madri in whose arms her husband died ; Draupadi was jealous of Subhadra, Arjuna's second wife, and Kausalya of Kaikeyi the child wife of Dasaratha.

Hindu scriptures contain interesting tales of the jealousies of goddesses who seem to be no better than mortal women in this respect. The handsome moon-god Chandra, for instance, married the twenty-seven daughters of the celestial patriarch Daksha and had to suffer much at their hands. At the time of the marriage, the foresighted patriarch made Chandra promise that he would treat all his twenty-seven wives alike. But Chandra found it difficult to keep his promise and doted on the beautiful Rohini with whom he spent most of his time. The other twenty-six ladies complained of this partiality to their father, and Daksha admonished his son-in-law to mend his ways and keep his word. The moon made a show of repentence and agreed to abide by this promise. But the attractions of Rohini proved too strong for the niceties of domestic justice and a repetition of the old complaint reached Daksha. The angry patriarch then cursed the moon to wane away in fourteen days, and only a protest from all the gods of the pantheon could make Daksha let his son-in-law regain his original shape in as many days.

It is, however, doubtful if the moon-god could have avoided a complaint by treating all his wives alike. Equality of treatment does not always bring happiness to the several wives of a man. The holy sage Subhari, for instance, married the fifty daughters of Mandhatar and treated them all alike, yet he could not avoid complaints. The sage by his occult powers split himself into fifty, each part as good as his original self, and used to enjoy the company of each of his wives so that none of them could feel herself neglected by her husband. But the mighty man could not fathom the mind of woman. For the women still complained. They were not aware that their husband could split himself into fifty, and each one of them complained that her fourty-nine sisters were neglected by her husband who was constantly in her company. Thus, the impossibility of pleasing women.

The Hindus have given some thought to the question whether a man or woman is the better sex. That she has a stronger sex nature is generally admitted by them. Man is said to be no match for her. "Love of scandal and lust of sex did the creator give women. A man can never keep a woman under control, whether by strong words, blows, bonds or by inflicting pain—women are always unbridled in their passion." Kalyanmalla, the author of Ananga Ranga says, "a woman eats twice as much as a man, she is four times as much clever, her determination is six times as strong, and her sexual desire eight times as strong as a man's."

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In spite of these observations, it must be admitted that the general view among the Hindus is that man is the better sex. Woman being bond and subject, it is thought a blessing among the Hindus to be born as man. Intellectually, women are considered the inferior of men and to call a man a woman is an insult which dubs him as weak and cowardly.

There are some stories in the *Mahabharata* of men and women who had the rare opportunities of changing their sexes. And the experiences of these gifted individuals narrated in the epic will give the reader some idea of what the Hindus think of the relative advantages of the sexes.

We have already narrated the story of the princess Amba who was captured by Bhishma and released by him on his coming to know that she was in love with the Salva king. Amba was rejected by the Salva king and had to go into a forest to live the life of an ascetic. Her thirst for vengeance on Bhishma was insatiable and she took to severe penances with a view to propitiate Shiva. Pleased with the strictness of her austerity, Shiva appeared before her and Amba begged of him to grant her a boon by which she could bring about the destruction of Bhishma. Shiva blessed her to be born as the son of king Drupada and disappeared. Amba, to hasten her rebirth as a man, burnt herself to death.

Amba was, accordingly, reborn as Drupada's child, but the babe was noticed to be a girl and not a boy. Drupada himself was desperately praying for a son, and Shiva had in fact blessed him to become the father of a son. The disappointed Drupada complained of the sex of the child to Shiva, and this god pacified the king by an assurance that the child would in course of time become a boy and all would be well with himself and the child. Putting his faith on Shiva's word, Drupada concealed the sex of the child and brought it up as a boy. The secret was well guarded and Drupada's 'son' married the daughter of Hiranyavarman, the powerful king of Dasarnas.

The bride on her nuptial bed discovered the true sex of her 'husband' and fled to her father's house and revealed to him the nature of the hoax played upon her. Hiranyavarman, blazing with wrath, marched to the kingdom of Drupada with a formidable army to avenge himself on Drupada. As soon as Drupada's 'son' heard of this 'he' disappeared into a forest and decided to put an end to 'his' life. As 'he' was wandering in the forest looking for a convenient spot to commit suicide, 'he' happened to meet a Yaksha* who wished to know of him the cause of his distress. The Yaksha on hearing 'his' story, took pity on 'him' and volunteered to exchange his sex with the princess. Shikhandin (this was the name of the princess) thankfully accepted the offer and exchanged her sex with the Yaksha. He promised the Yaksha that he would come back to the forest after the departure of Hiranyavarman and give his sex back to the Yaksha.

Converted into a handsome young man Shikhandin went back to his palace and calmly awaited the arrival of his father-in-law.

Drupada sent word to Hiranyavarman, who had by now camped outside his city and was making preparations for an attack, not to be carried away by the babblings of a silly girl but to come and have a look at his son himself or send reliable people to examine him. Accordingly, Hiranyavarman sent eunuchs and harmless old women to examine Shikhandin, and these, after a thorough examination reported to the king that the youth was really a man and his daughter was probably suffering from hallucinations. Hiranyavarman, looking very foolish, apologized to Drupada for his rash act and rebuking his hysterical daughter for starting all this unpleasantness, went back to his kingdom.

* A semi-mythical being.

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True to his promise, Shikhandin, on the departure of Hiranyavarman, went back to the forest to return his sex to the Yaksha, but things had happened in the forest during Shikandin's absence to make this impossible. While the Yaksha was living in the forest as a woman, his king, the lordly Kubera, happened to pass that way. All the Yakshas of the forest very naturally appeared before their king to pay homage except the metamorphosed one. Kubera noticed his absence and immediately sent messengers to bring the Yaksha. When this individual came, he was found to be a woman and Kubera wishing to know of the metamorphosis the Yaksha told him all that had happened. The king of the Yakshas was much amused by the story and decided that the Yaksha should retain for good the sex he had voluntarily accepted. His friends, however, interceded on behalf of the Yaksha and Kubera permitted the Yaksha to regain his original sex after the death of Shikhandin.

Another story of a similar nature is of prince Bhangasvana. This young man went out hunting in a forest and on accidentally taking bath in the charmed waters of a lake found himself converted to a woman. The prince who had many wives and a hundred sons abandoned his kingdom for shame and his wives out of necessity, and became a wandering mendicant. While she was passing a forest a penitent saw her and fell violently in love with her. The penitent married her, and out of this union was born a hundred sons. When the sons grew into manhood, the mother wished to see them well established in life. With this end in view she took her sons to her kingdom and asked the hundred sons she had already had as a man, to share the kingdom with the new progeny. The old hundred would hear none of this, and the new hundred pressed their claim. Words led to blows and the two hundred sons of Bhangasvana started a fierce fight among themselves, and it looked as if they would all destroy one another. Their parent in her distress prayed to god Indra to do something for her sons. Indra appeared before her but he could not stop the bloody fray. He, however, undertook to save one hundred sons by killing the others and Bhangasvana was given the choice of deciding which hundred should perish. The lady preferred to save the life of those hundred sons of whom she was the mother. Accordingly Indra fought on the side of these sons and destroyed the one hundred of whom she was the father.

The myth is intended to illustrate the stronger affection of the mother for her children than the father.

It may be added that Indra asked Bhangasvana if she wished to regain her lost manhood, but she answered in the negative and stated in support of her decision that she derived greater pleasure from sexual union as a woman than as a man and would not give up this pleasure for anything on earth.

In spite of this general tendency among the Hindus to treat woman as sexually more virile, polyandry is prohibited among them and polygyny was actively encouraged till recently.

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Chapter Seven

THE POWER OF WOMAN

Whatever difference of opinion there may be among the Hindus about the nature of woman, there is complete unanimity in their recognition of her power. The word Sakti, a synonym for woman, means power or energy. The active principle in the universe is described as feminine by the Saktas, a powerful and widely distributed sect of whom we will have to take notice in a later chapter.

The Hindus have a proverb which purports to say that all strife in the world is caused by gold or woman, predominantly by woman. The *Ramayana;* like Homer's *Illiad,* has the abduction of a beautiful woman for its theme. The *Mahabharata,* though in a lesser degree, attributes the epic struggle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas to its heroine Draupadi; true, the greed of possession and the pride of dominion were the main factors that started the enmity between the cousins, but it was aggravated by Duryodhana's loss of Draupadi in the archery contest and her marriage to Arjuna. Later, as we have seen in a previous chapter, Draupadi's passion for revenge alone kept up the spirit of mischief which but for her would have died down and led to an amicable settlement between the cousins.

Of the power of woman to create strife numerous stories are narrated in the sacred books of the Hindus. A very popular tale of this kind is the destruction of the demons Sunda and Upasunda. These two brothers were so devoted to each other that nothing could give rise to a quarrel between them. They ate together, played together, slept together, and travelled together when they went on a journey. They jointly propitiated Brahma and obtained a boon from him by which they could be destroyed by no one except themselves. Blessed with this boon Sunda and Upasunda considered themselves as good as immortals since a quarrel between them was thought to be an impossibility.

Secure from all harm from men or gods, the two demons started tyrannising the fourteen worlds. They waged war on the gods and drove them out of heaven. The earth and the beings thereon went in fear of them. The full moon was forced to shine every night without waning, and the sun was ordered to exhume just a pleasant, mild heat. The gods of wind and rain, likewise, had to dance attendance on the demons. A good many of the gods of heaven were forced to do menial work for Sunda and Upasunda. Reduced to such wretchedness the gods approached Brahma for the redress of their grievances. Now Brahma, though the bestower of the boon, had no power to cancel it. He took counsel with his compeers and started thinking of a way out to bring about the destruction of the aggressive demons. The obvious method of their destruction was by causing strife between the brothers and making them kill each other. But the affection between the brothers was a by-word in the fourteen worlds, and no plan could be conceived potent enough to cause strife between Sunda and Upasunda. At last, Narada, the genius of dissention, told the distressed gods that a woman and a woman alone could make the brothers quarrel among themselves. The gods applauded the wisdom of Narada and Brahma commanded Visvakarma, the celestial sculptor, to produce a nymph surpassing in loveliness everything that had been created before. Visvakarma laboured for days and created the nymph Thilothama of perfect form and gait, and when this lovely creature was presented to the court of Indra, king of the gods, even austere sages were noticed behaving in a funny manner. The gods blessed the fay and sent her on her delicate mission.

When Sunda and Upasunda were engaged in the pleasures of the chase in a beautiful and wild forest, Thilothama appeared before them. The wind god skilfully blew her transparent clothes from her body and the god of love shot his sharpest shafts at the

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brothers. Both of them immediately fell in love with the fay, and proposed to her. Thilothama, affecting coyness, said she was a strict monogamist and could bestow her favours only on one of them and they were to decide between themselves who should possess her. Now each one of the brothers pressed his own claim for the hand of the nymph. The elder brother maintained that as the senior in age he had the right to marry the fay whereupon the younger demon expressed astonishment that his brother should so blind himself by selfishness as to overlook the universal rule that youth and love always go together. Polite expression of claims soon degenerated into use of bad language and this led to blows. The two demons then fought fiercely and killed each other, and Thilothama went back to heaven to report the successful termination of her mission.

In a similar situation, when the whole race of Asuras or demons were on the point of annihilating the gods, the mighty god Vishnu himself had recourse to the wiles of a woman to save the celestials from impending doom. The gods, due to the curse of a mighty sage, lost their energy and became emaciated. To recoup their lost vigour Vishnu advised them to churn the milk ocean of heaven and feed on the ambrosia, the cream. Now, the mountain Mandhara had to be used for a churning stick and the emaciated gods could neither uproot the huge mountain nor twirl it in the milk ocean. In this predicament they requisitioned the help of the Asuras who were promised half the Ambrosia as a reward for their labours. The Asuras accepted the offer and did most of the churning and when ambrosia floated on the waters of the milk ocean they collected it and were not in a mood to part with any portion of it. The helpless gods could only argue and the Asuras turned a deaf ear to their arguments. Vishnu now secretly assumed the form of a dancing girl and appeared before them. They were so taken by the beauty and rhythmic gait of the dancer that the existence of the ambrosia was almost forgotten. Mohini, the dancer, sweetly smiled on the Asuras and they cheered her with thunderous shouts. She gave a minor performance of her art and they were so impressed by her perfection that they invited her to mediate between the gods and them. With a show of reluctance she accepted the offer and declared that since she wanted justice to triumph, the ambrosia should be divided equally between the gods and Asuras. Both the gods and Asuras cheered her. Upon this she said that as the gods were weaker they should be served first and asked the gods and demons to be seated in two separate rows. When all were properly seated, she gracefully took the vessel containing ambrosia and served the gods. When the last god was served, Mohini just disappeared with the ambrosia!

The Asuras set up an uproar but the gods, invigorated by the ambrosia they had quaffed, gave battle to the Asuras and drove them away to the nether regions.

Another beautiful story illustrating the charm and power of woman and incidentally that wondrous passion, new-born love, is told in the *Mahabharata*. It is the tale of the youthful penitent Rishyasringa, son of Vibhandaka. Rishyasringa was mysteriously born of an antelope and was brought up by his father in a forest without his having had a chance of ever seeing a woman. Thus unaffected by the weakening influence of woman, the youth enjoyed many occult powers one of which was that he could bring down rain from the heavens by his mere presence.

Now in the kingdom of Anga there was a long, dreadful drought and Lomapada, king of Anga, consulted all the learned Brahmins of his kingdom with a view to propitiate the god of rain and save his country from the devastating drought which was causing famine and pestilence. The learned men informed the king that the easiest way to cause rain in the land was to entice the young ascetic Rishyasringa from the forest to the capital of Anga.

It was well-known that Rishyasringa loved the forest and his hermitage and no ordinary offer could attract him to Anga. A wise man however said that a beautiful woman

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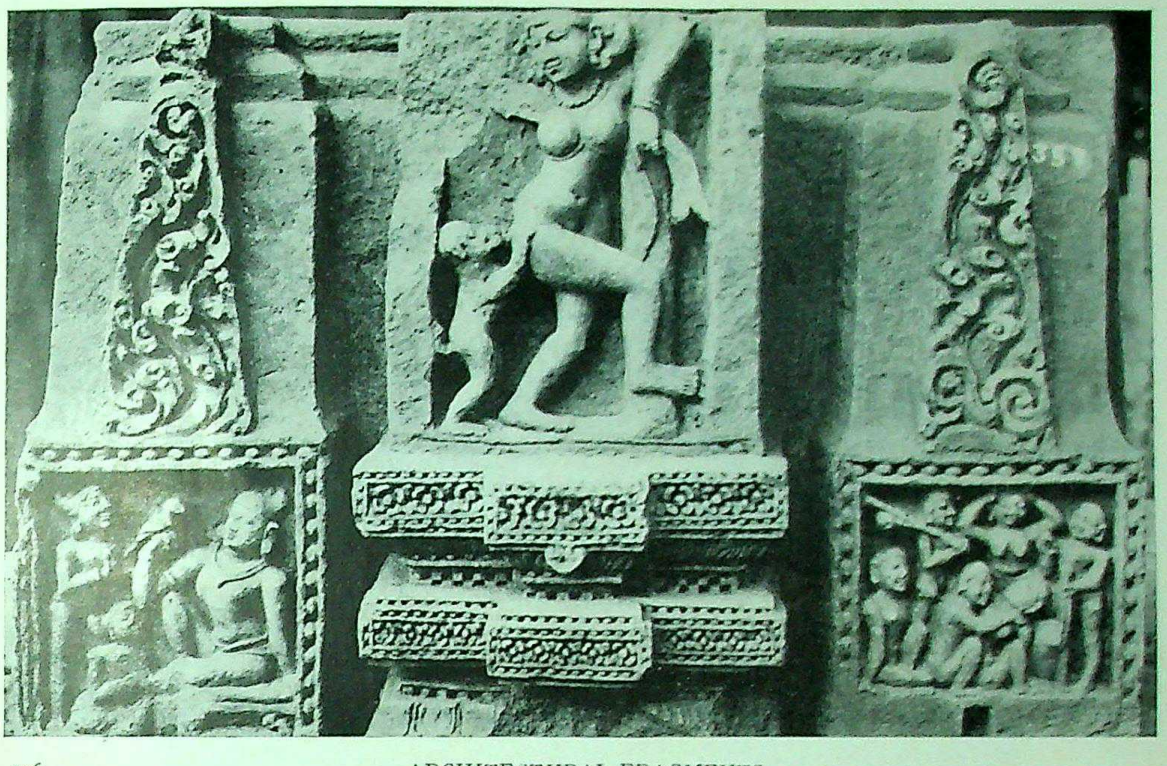

106 ARCHITECTURAL FRAGMENTS
Khiching, Mayurbhanj, Orissa : 11th Century A. D.
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107 A GROUP OF FEMALE FIGURES CARVED IN RELIEF
Khiching, Mayurbhanj, Orissa : 11th Century A. D.
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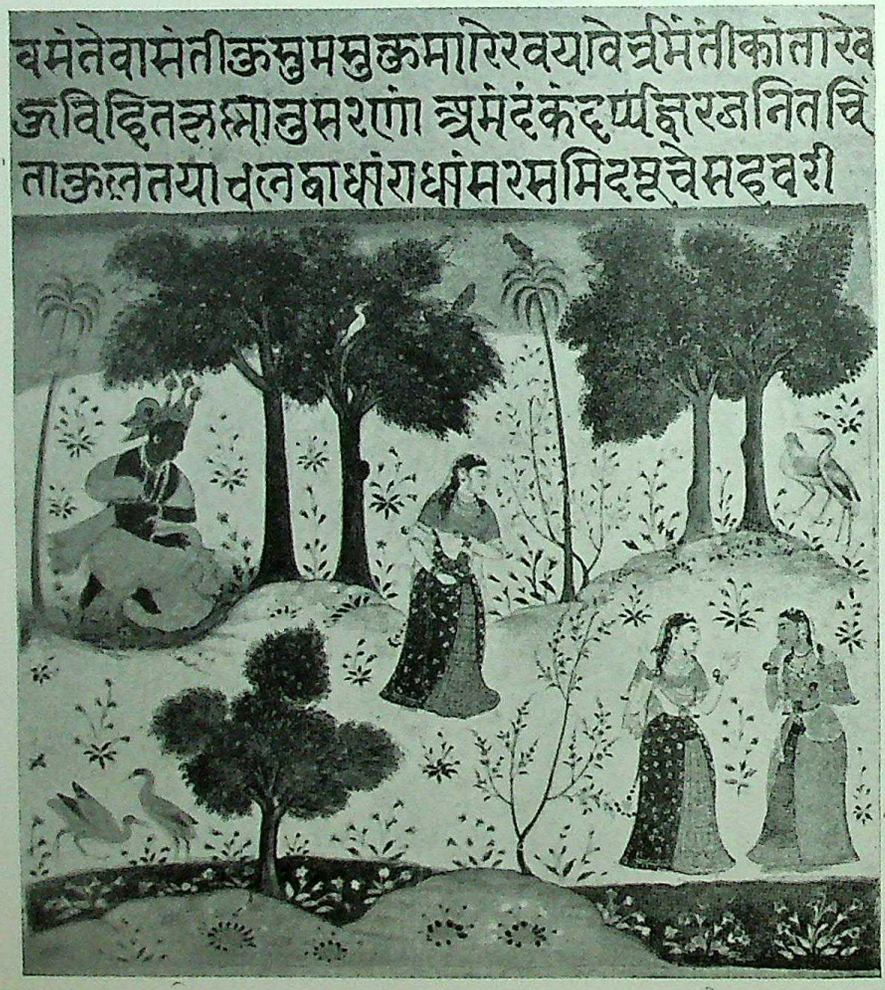
108 DRINKING PARTY
Rajput School of painting : 18th Century A. D.
Library of A. Chester Beatty



109 ILLUSTRATIONS FROM *GITA GOVINDA*
Rajput School of painting : 18th Century : From *Art of India and Pakistan*, Leigh Ashton

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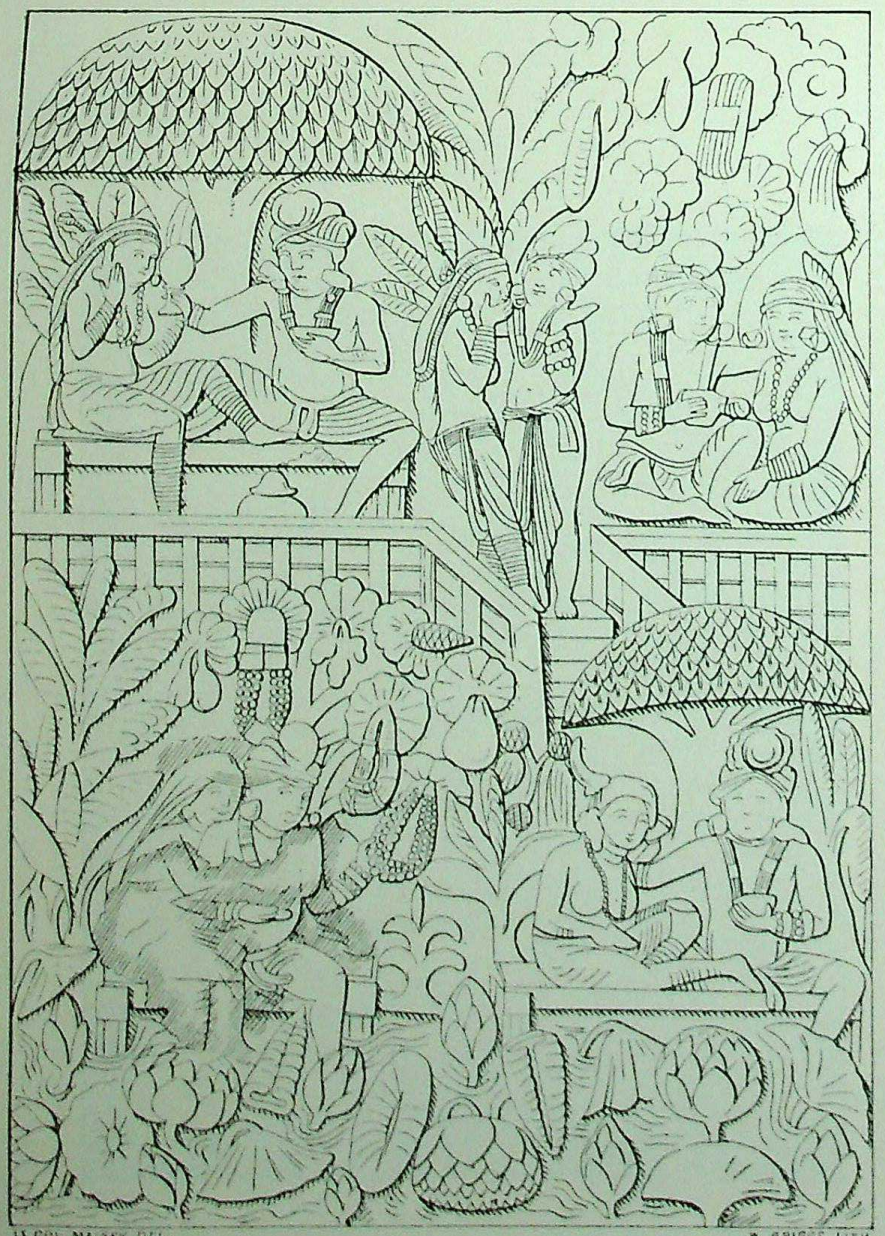
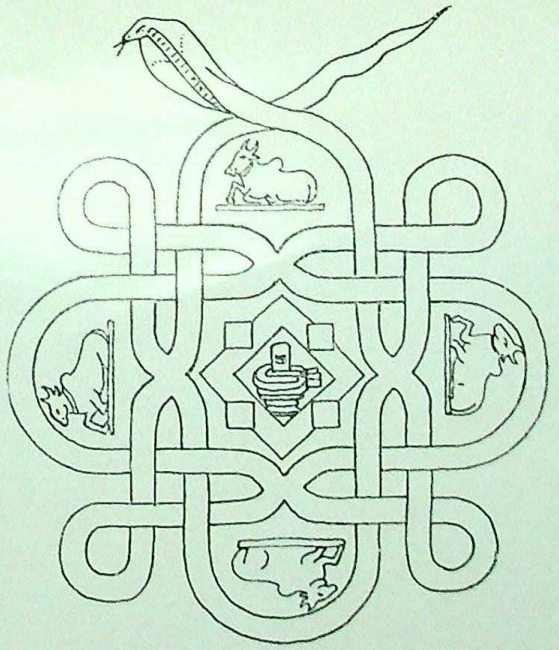
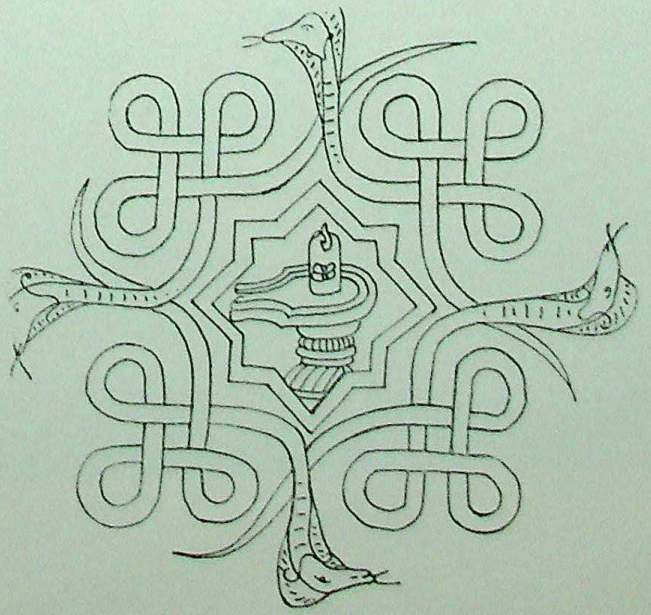


110 LOVE SCENES

Buddhist Period: From Ferguson's *Tree and Serpent Worship*



111 A Yantra or mystic diagram showing the Lingam protected by Nandi (bull) and a serpent



112 A Yantra showing the Lingam protected by four serpents

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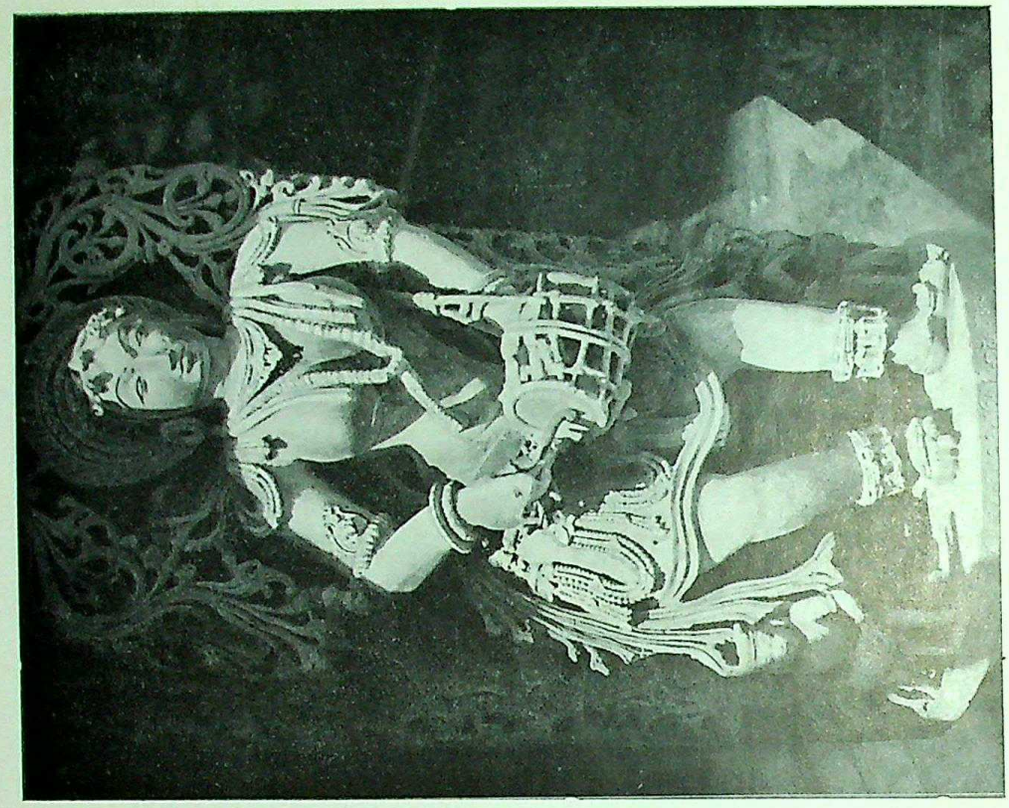
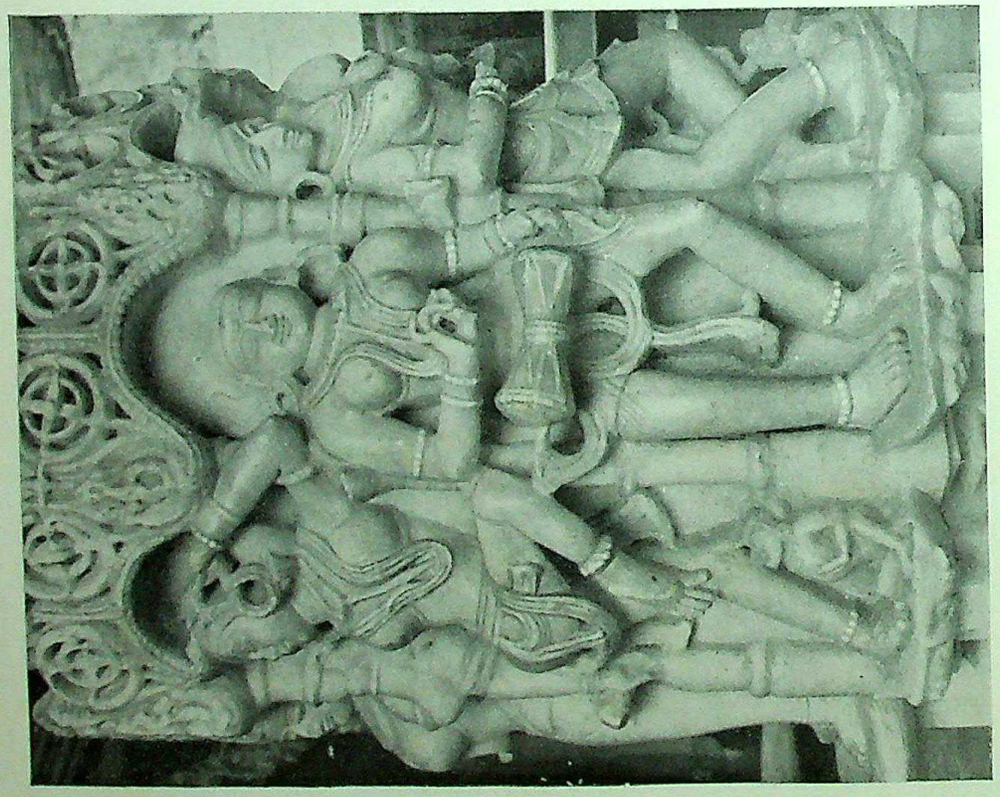


114 A WOMAN PLAYING ON A DRUM
Belur Temple, Mysore : 12th Century A. D.



113 DANCE SEQUENCE
Dilwara Temple, Mt. Abu : 11th Century A. D.
Photo : A. K. Banerji

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would probably be able to entice him to the city. But fearing the wrath of the chaste youth and his equally mighty father no dancer in the kingdom would undertake the hazardous mission. An old bawd, however, after much persuasion agreed to go to the forest leading an army of youthful heart-ravishers.

The bawd with her company camped on the outskirts of the forest, and sent her lovely daughter, an adept in the game of seduction, to the hermitage of Rishyasringa. The young courtesan reached the hermitage at an opportune moment when Rishyasringa was alone, his father having gone out to gather berries for their meal. The charming woman, her smiles and honeyed words, her gait, poise and figure, the way she offered him fruits and drink and above all her touch and caress raised unknown emotions in the young man and when Rishyasringa was thoroughly worked up, she slipped away from the hermitage and returned to her mother.

Shortly after, Vibhandaka returned to the hermitage and noticed a remarkable change in his son. The melancholy youth sat in the yard of the hermitage gazing vacantly at the sky unmindful of his sacred duties, sunk in deep thought. Vibhandaka spoke to his son : "Why art thou, my beloved son, sunk in melancholy thoughts, and distressed ? Tell me who came here today ?"

Rishyasringa answered : "Dear father, when you were away, a chaste and lovely youth came here. He was resplendent as a god, of correct stature and build. He wore long tresses and had eyes like lotus blossoms. On his snow white neck gleamed a runnel shaped light. And beneath the neck he had two globes, most delightful to touch. He had a slender waist and large round hips and from his garb a gold girdle gleamed forth. On his wrists and ankles he wore jingling gold, and he moved about with the ease and grace of a swan in a lake.

"His face was the embodiment of light and his words were like nectar to my soul. When the gentle breeze fanned him, scents more fragrant than those of forest flowers filled the air. His black shining tresses, parted in two, bound in golden braid and adorned with flowers, hung down in folds, curling on the forehead. His ears were decked with many fair things, in colour as the feathers of the peacock and the Chakravaka.

"The beautiful youth was playful as a fawn ; he took me by the tresses, clasped me in a close embrace and pressed his lips to mine. And O ! father, I shuddered with delight never known before ! And then suddenly he disappeared in the woods. Father dear, I cannot live without that delightful young man. Pray, take me to the hermitage in which he lives ; I will do the penance he does and live the chaste life he leads. My soul burns to have a sight of the godlike youth."

His son's words disturbed Vibhandaka who feared that some evil spirit in lovely shape had appeared before his son to lure him from his pious activities. He set out on a vain hunt for the devil and, baffled, returned to the hermitage and warned his son to be on his guard against the wiles of roving fays. All this advice was, however, lost on the young penitent. For once again when Vibhandaka was away from the hermitage, the enchanting courtesan appeared before Rishyasringa. The youth was so impatiently waiting for a sight of her that as soon as he saw her he said : "Let us depart immediately to thy hermitage before my father returns."

The courtesan, well pleased with this eagerness of her victim, took him to her mother and the bawd triumphantly proceeded to her city and presented the penitent to Lomapada. Rishyasringa already charmed by the company of the fair women of the city was further honoured by the king who gave his most beautiful daughter Shanta in marriage to the young sage. The penitent now forgot all about his father and the hermitage and settled down in the country of Anga. The long-awaited rain fell, and plenty ruled the land.

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The ire of Vibhandaka had, however, to be counted with. This mighty sage learnt of his chaste son's seduction, and waxing wroth, started to the city of Lomapada with the intention of reducing the kingdom of Anga to ashes by his scorching anger. The king had already foreseen such a contingency and had given strict instructions to all his subjects and officers of state to treat the sage with the utmost hospitality and reverence wherever he might appear. Vibhandaka on his way to the capital of Anga was so courteously received and lavishly entertained by the people and, on reaching the capital, by the king himself, that he forgot his hostility to Lomapada and got reconciled to his son's seduction and marriage. In fact, Vibhandaka went back to his hermitage blessing the king, his daughter, her husband, and the people of Anga.

The story teller and the poet often delight in the ever-popular theme of the power of woman for evil. There is nothing a woman would not stoop to, when she sets her heart on mischief.

"As words of truth she praises lies,
As arrant falsehood truth decries,
And mistress of deceptive sleight,
Treats right as wrong, and wrong as right.
All powers which wizard demons old,
Of whom such wondrous tales are told,
Displayed the gods themselves to cheat,
To blind, elude, and so defeat,
Such fascinating powers we find
In artful women all combined ;
So skilfully they men deceive,
So well their viewless nets can weave,
That few whom these syrens clasp
Can soon escape their grasp. *

Living in the midst of such wily charmers, it is no wonder that men are often led astray by them. But great is the man who successfully resists the degenerating influence of woman ! By denying themselves the pleasures women afford, men are said to have become gods and even displaced Indra, king of the gods. Indra, however, is ever on the look out for such mighty ascetics and as soon as he discovers one tries his utmost to bring about his fall. His favourite method of degenerating such pure souls is to send one of the beautiful dancing girls of his court with instructions to appear before the ascetic at an opportune moment, display her charms and seduce the anchorite. Very often this works well ; for as the Hindu sages themselves admit there are few strong men in the world who can resist the charms of a beautiful woman. The well-known story of Viswamitra and Menaka narrated below is a typical example.

King Viswamitra, defeated in battle by a mighty Brahmin of occult powers decided to become a Brahmin and with this object in view propitiated Brahma by severe austerities. By the accumulated virtue of his penances Viswamitra became so powerful as even to challenge Brahma and create a world of his own. While the royal ascetic was thus engaged in the practice of austerities, Indra became suspicious of his intentions and to safeguard his own throne sent the fay Menaka to tempt Viswamitra. Menaka appeared by the riverside when the sage was having his ablutions and she started playing about in the sand bed of

* The *Mahabharata*, Tr. : J. Muir.

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the river. A gentle breeze waved apart her scanty clothes showing a most symmetrical body. The sage, a good connoisseur of figure and poise in his royal days, thought, in a moment of weakness, that there were greater things in life than the attainment of Brahminhood. He fell for the charms of the celestial courtesan, gave up his austerities and took Menaka to bed.*

After living with Menaka for years Viswamitra, however, awoke to a sense of his duties, drove the nymph away and repaired to the forest to continue his austerities. The union was not, however, without fruit, for Menaka when she was driven away was big with child. Of her was born Shakuntala, the heroine of Kalidasa's well-known play.

Celibacy is considered by the Hindus as conducive to the attainment of exceptional physical and occult powers. Bhishma, the great chariot fighter of the *Mahabharata*, is said to have acquired his skill in arms through strict celibacy. In the *Ramayana* we have his compeer in Hanuman, the mighty monkey general, whose fabulous physical strength is attributed to celibacy. This praise of the celibate is not, however, very convincing. For greater than Bhishma was Krishna, the husband of 16,008 women ; and greater than Hanuman was his married rival Bali, to say nothing of his own master Rama, the ideal hero of Brahminical writers.

The truth is, though some writers with their love of exaggeration have caricatured the power of woman for evil, the Hindus in general have a sound respect for woman as man's partner in life, and have recognized her power in all fields of human activities. Sex as a mysterious, all-pervading force has its protagonists as well as opponents among the Hindus.

While a man's means of obtaining occult powers is believed to be asceticism, a woman, because of her supposed weakness of mind and intellect, is not considered capable of rising to any great spiritual height by the practice of austerities. There are, it is true, a few tales of women who have achieved greatness through asceticism. Uma, for instance, is said to have won Shiva's favours and married him by the severity of her penances ; and Amba, as we have seen, made Shiva appear before her by her ascetic powers and obtained a boon from him by which she brought about the destruction of Bhishma. These are exceptions rather than the rule. The power of woman is essentially of a worldly nature. There is, however, one method by which a woman can attain occult powers denied even to man. This is by her Pativrityam, *i.e.*, absolute devotion to her husband.

In order to ensure a woman's complete loyalty and devotion to her husband, the Hindus considerably exaggerate the mysterious powers of Pativrityam, and many a story is invented to instil in women a high sense of duty towards their husbands. We have already noticed in an earlier chapter the story of a lady who stopped the sunrise because in the morning her beloved husband was to die. In the well-known tale of Satyavan and Savitri, this lady is said to have reclaimed the soul of her dead husband from the god of death and revived him. Damayanti, wife of Nala, is fabled to have burnt away a hunter who approached her with evil intentions by the scorching power of her Pativrityam. Sita is said to have lived in the fortress of Lanka unharmed by the demon Ravana protected by the magic powers obtained through her devotion to her husband. More wonderful than all is the tale of Anasuya, wife of the sage Atri and the pattern of domestic virtue, who converted Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva into harmless babies when these three great gods went to tempt her.

Nor shall we omit the charming story of the dutiful Brahmin housewife on whom the rage of the most potent Veda-learned sage was ineffective. A Veda-learned sage was,

* For details of the story please read *Epics, Myths & Legends of India* (Taraporevala).

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one day, meditating under a tree when a hen-crane perching on a branch above dirtied his devoted head. The angry sage looked upwards and, scorched by his anger, the crane fell down dead from the tree. This cooled the rage of the sage and he repented of his unreasonable anger, realisation having come to him, though late, that it is in the nature of cranes to ease themselves from the branches of trees. In expiation of his sinful anger which caused the destruction of life, the sage went on a begging round in the village. In the first house he went, he addressed himself to the busy housewife and asked her to give him food. But the lady was engaged in her domestic duties as her husband was expected home soon and everything had to be ready before his arrival; she very naturally told the sage to wait till the arrival of her husband.

The quick tempered sage could not understand the attitude of a woman who asked such a holy personage as himself to wait for the arrival of so ordinary an individual as her husband. He uttered a mighty curse for her destruction but was surprised to find that the curse, always so potent, had no effect on the lady. The housewife now smiled and informed the hungry sage that she was no hen-crane to be withered away by his anger. For a married woman, she told him for his edification, her husband was greater than all the sages of the fourteen worlds and the thirty-three crores and three gods of the pantheon. Thus instructed in the prime duties of woman, the learned sage, his pride humbled and rage cooled, went away blessing the lady.

Nor is sex the only power of woman. The power of matrons over their irretractable sons has been narrated in many books. Kunti, mother of the five Pandava princes, ruled her sons with almost matriarchal authority. Gandhari, mother of the Kauravas, was also a woman of extraordinary ability and her independent son Duryodhana often submitted to her will though not to his father's.

In the medieval times the power of the matriarch considerably declined, but there have always been in Hindu society women of exceptional courage and ability who have not only ruled their sons but husbands too. In modern India the authority of the mother, however, is confined mainly to social matters. The number of neglected mothers who perpetually complain of their ungrateful sons seem to be on the increase. This complaint is not, however, a modern one; the passage given below shows that it is at least as old as the *Mahabharata*. Says the wise Vidura:

"These six always despise those who earlier had done them good: disciples despise the teacher when their instruction is ended; the sons the mother when they have married; the lover the woman when his love is dead; they whose business has been carried through, him that does it; he that has crossed the waste of the sea, the ship, and the healed sick the leech." *

The power of a daughter over her doting father is illustrated in the tale of Devayani. This young lady was the only daughter of the sage Sukra, the preceptor of the Asuras. Sukra was a learned sage who knew the incantation which could bring the dead back to life. He was so devoted to Devayani that she often behaved like a spoilt child. To please her, he taught Kacha the art of reviving the dead and brought about the ruin of the Asuras. Kacha was a secret agent sent by the gods to the preceptor of the Asuras to learn from him the charm of life. Devayani fell in love with him and proposed to him, but Kacha refused to marry her and went back to the gods as soon as he had learnt the secret from Sukra and used his knowledge against the Asuras.

Later Devayani picked up a quarrel with Sharmishata, daughter of the king of the Asuras, and Sharmishata called Devayani the daughter of her father's slave. The weeping

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Devayani went to her father and wished to know of him if he was really the slave of the Asura king. Sukra told her that far from being the slave of the Asura king, he was his preceptor and as such his master. Devayani now told Sukra to prove this assertion by giving Sharmishata as a slave to her. The old dotard immediately proceeded to his king and threatened to leave his service if he would not give princess Sharmishata as slave to Devayani. The distressed king made enquiries and found out the reason for this extra-ordinary demand of the Brahmin. He reprimanded his daughter for insulting Devayani and commanded her to serve Devayani as slave.

This trouble, however, did not end here. Devayani married king Jajati, and Sharmishata often waited on Jajati and Devayani. While Devayani undoubtedly had a stronger will, Sharmishata had better looks and the result was what could be expected of such a situation.

Woman is essentially an emotional creature and her greatness is believed to be in the correct direction of her sentiments. There have been, no doubt, exceptions to this rule. Mention is made in Hindu scriptures of several women who were distinguished for their vast learning. Sulabha was such a person. This lady was a famous philosopher and scholar and is said to have instructed king Janaka, no mean intellectual himself, in metaphysics. So vast was Sulabha's learning that no man could be found equal to the task of marrying her, and she had to lead a single life. The texts, however, do not make it clear if she was as good looking as she was learned.

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PART THREE

POETRY ART AND SCIENCE OF LOVE

Chapter Eight

LOVE POETRY

Devotion and love have been inspiring sources of poetry among the Hindus. The two emotions meet on a higher plane, and some of the great ancient bards of love were also great devotees. We will have to deal with this blending of love and religious fervour in mysticism in a later chapter ; for the present we will confine ourselves to mundane love.

According to Hindu writers, cardinal emotions are nine and of these Sringara (sex love) is considered one of the most important. This emotion is given a unique place in the fine arts, and no person is considered perfect without an adequate experience of Sringara. A story is told of the philosopher Sankara whose claim to ominiscience was successfully challenged because of his ignorance of the master passion. Sankaras's reputation for erudition was so great that his followers and partisans constructed a throne of the 'all-knowing' for him and invited him to ascend it. The complacent philosopher accepted the invitation and was about to sit on the throne when his pretensions to ominiscience was challenged. Sankara was a celibate and had no knowledge of Sringara. The philosopher was honest enough to admit his ignorance of this branch of human experience, and he was debarred from occupying the throne. It is said that he was later on initiated into the pleasant mysteries by a humble woman.

Most of the love stories of the Hindus have their origin in the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. The latter may even be considered as a continuous love story, Sita's love for her husband dominating the whole plot. The delightful tales of Nala and Damayanti, of Satyavan and Savitri, of Dushyanta and Shakuntala and numerous other love stories are found in the *Mahabharata*. Further, the personality of Draupadi, the common wife of the five Pandava princes, plays a leading role in this epic.

Borrowing their themes mainly from the epics, later Sanskrit poets have written love poems and romances. No Hindu poet has, however, been able to depict love, especially maiden love, in so exquisite a manner as Kalidasa has done in his play *Shakuntala*. The original story is found in the *Mahabharata*, but Kalidasa, when he adopted it for the stage made considerable changes in the plot and setting, and the play as it stands today differs substantially from the original.

The opening scene of the play is set in the forest hermitage of Kanva, Shakuntala's foster father. King Dushyanta, while hunting game in the forest, strays into the hermitage and happens to see Shakuntala and her two companions, Priyamvada and Anasuya, watering the flower plants of the hermitage. On beholding Shakuntala, the king exclaims to himself :

In palaces such charms are rarely ours ;

The woodland plants outshine the garden flowers.*

Not wishing to intrude, Dushyanta hides himself behind a tree and watches the playful maidens. The girls, after watering the plants, take rest in the shade of a tree. Shakuntala, reclining on a lawn, asks her friend Anasuya to loosen her bark girdle a little as Priyamvada had tied it very tight. Priyamvada is in no mood to accept the charge.

* Quotation from *Shakuntala* appearing in this chapter are from Monier William's translation of the play.

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She retorts : "Why do you lay the blame on me ? Blame rather your own youthfulness which imparts fulness to your bosom."

The king tells himself :

"A most just observation !
This youthful form, whose swelling charms
By the bark's knotted tissue are concealed
Like some fair bud close folded in its sheath,
Gives not to view the blooming of its beauty."

Priyamvada, during the maidens' conversation, compares Shakuntala, sitting close to a slender Kesara tree, as a blossoming creeper twining round the young tree.

The hiding Dushyanta was delighted with the simile and adds in approval :

Her ruddy lips vie with the opening bud ;
Her graceful arms are as the twining stalks ;
And her whole form is radiant with the flow
Of youthful beauty as the tree with blossom.

A bee hovers round Shakuntala's face and the maiden in annoyance tries to drive it away. The king already drunk with love of Shakuntala speaks in envy of the circling bee :

Where'er the bee his eager onset plies,
Now here, now there, she darts her kindling eyes :
Ah ! Happy bee ! How boldly dost thou try
To steal the lustre from her sparkling eye ;
And in thy circling movements hover near
To murmur tender secrets in her ear ;
Or as she coyly waves her hand, to sip
Voluptuous nectar from her lower lip !
While rising doubts my heart's fond hopes destroy,
Thou dost the fulness of her charms enjoy.

Presently Dushyanta shows himself to the maidens. They are somewhat surprised by his sudden appearance, but he works himself into their confidence by his easy, royal manners. He tries to drag Shakuntala into conversation, but the bashful maiden, much agitated by her own inexplicable interest in the intruder, dares not speak. The king notices her embarrassment with some measure of satisfaction. For,

Although she mingle not her words with mine,
Yet doth her listening ear drink in my speech
Although her eye shrinks from my ardent gaze,
No form but mine attracts its timid glances.

After a brief conversation with the maidens, the king leaves them. While parting, Shakuntala pretends that a blade of grass has pricked her foot, and she turns apparently to pick the blade but actually to steal a glance at her departing lover. As he departs, Dushyanta mutters to himself :

My limbs drawn onward leave my heart behind,
Like silken pennon borne against the wind.

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On his return to his hunting camp in the forest, the king decribes Shakuntala to his friend Mathavya in these words :

Man's all-wise Maker, wishing to create
A faultless form, whose matchless symmetry
Should far transcend Creation's choicest works,
Did call together by his mighty will,
And garner up in his eternal mind,
A bright assemblage of all lovely things :
And then, as in a picture, fashion them
Into one perfect and ideal form
Such the divine, the wondrous prototype,
When her fair shape was moulded into being.

Again,

This peerles maid is like a fragrant flower,
Whose perfumed breath has never been diffused ;
A tender bud, that no profaning hand
Has dared to sever from its parent stalk ;
A gem of priceless water, just released
Pure and unblemished from its glittering bed.
Or may the maiden haply be compared
To sweetest honey, that no mortal lip
Has sipped ; or rather, to the mellowed fruit
Of virtuous actions in some former birth,
Now brought to full perfection ? Lives the man
Whom bounteous heaven has destined to espouse her ?

The comically inclined Mathavya does not understand the king's passion for this hermit's daughter in preference to the accomplished women of the palace. He is, however, willing to admit that a king satiated by the pleasures of his harem may take a passing fancy for a rustic maiden, just as a city glutton overfed on dainties may taste a jungle berry for a change. Anyway, Mathavya is curious to know if this wonderful Shakuntala was responsive to the advances of Dushyanta. The love lorn prince is doubtful, but had discerned some hopeful signs ; for,

She did look towards me, though she quick withdrew
Her stealthy glance when she met my gaze ;
She smiled upon me sweetly, but disguised
With maiden grace the secret of her smiles ;
Coy love was half unveiled ; then sudden checked
By modesty, left half to be divined.

Nay more ;

Scarce had the fair one from my presence passed,
When suddenly without apparent cause,

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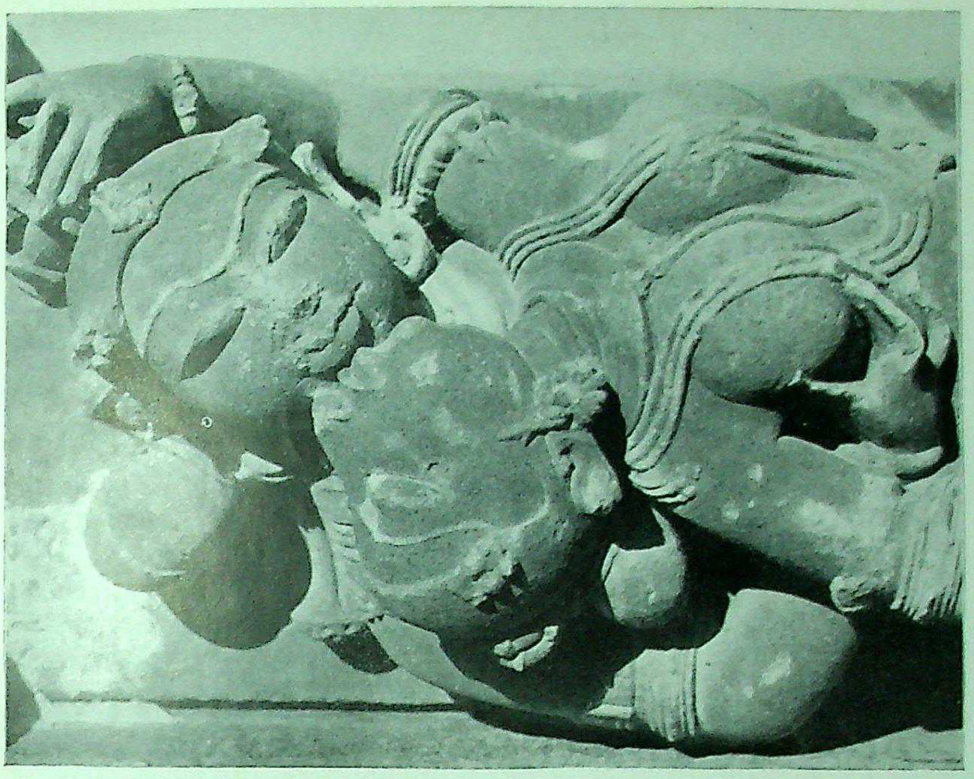
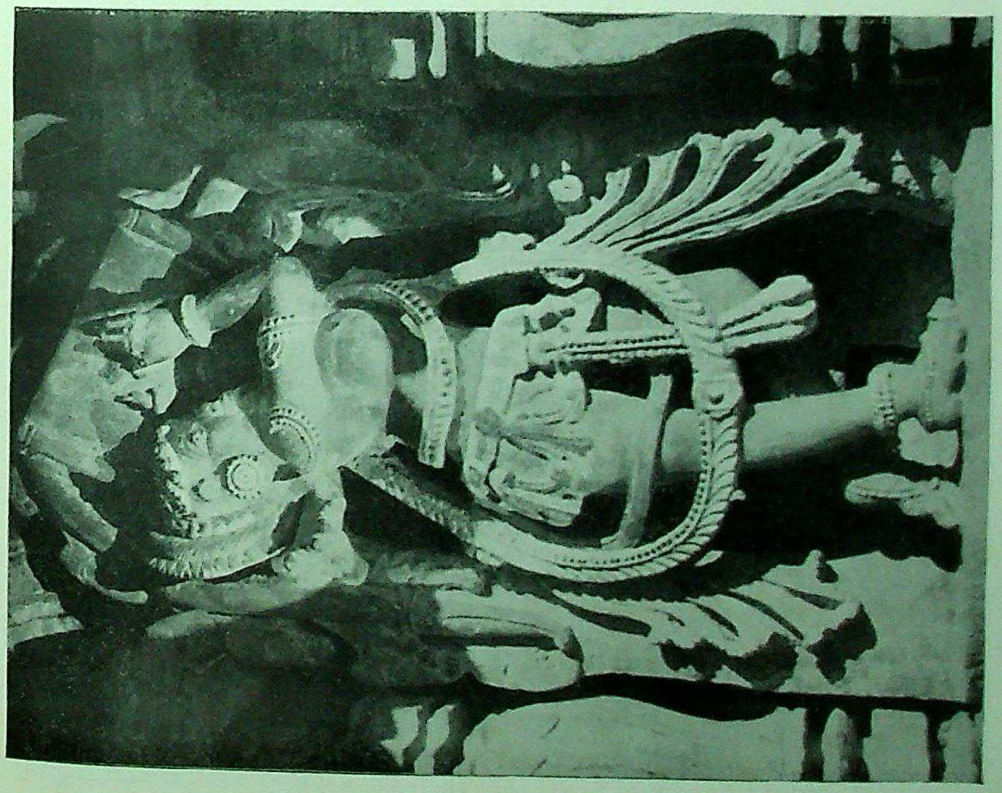


116 THE KISS
Central Indian Style
Khajuraho Temple : 11th Century A. D.



115 WRITING A LOVE LETTER
Belur Temple, Mysore : 12th Century A. D.

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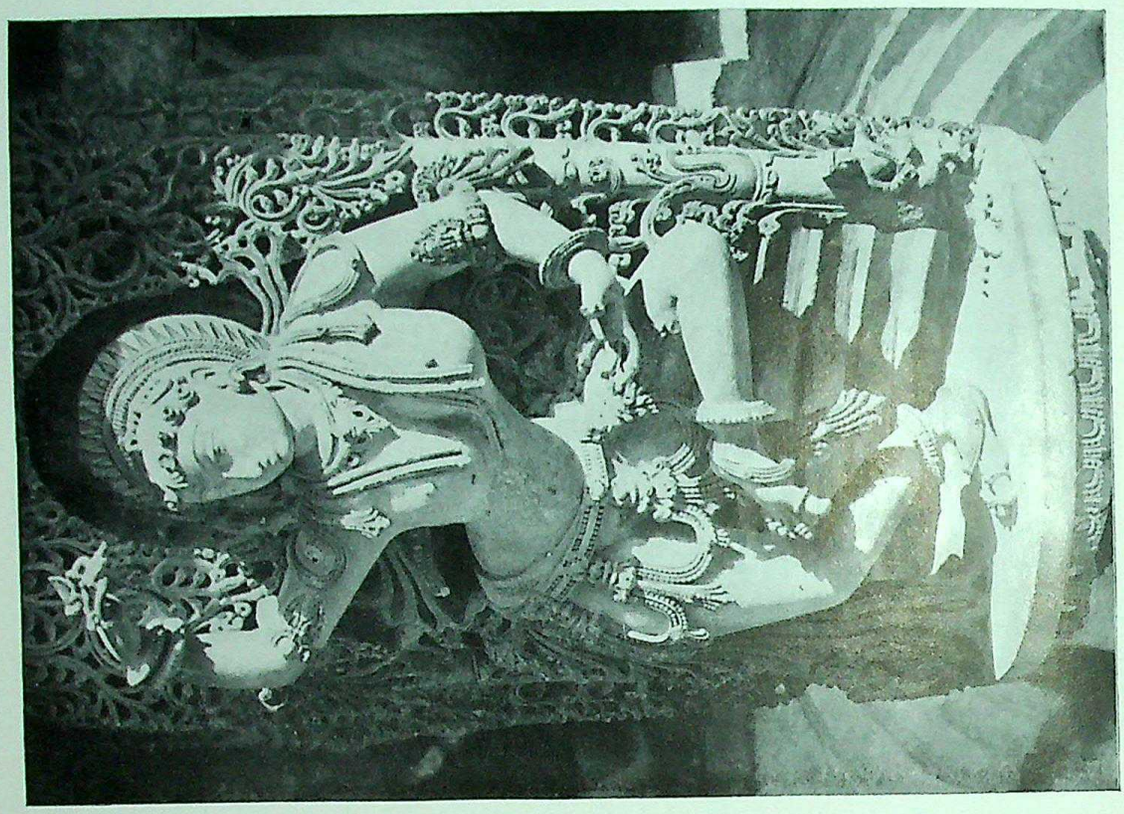
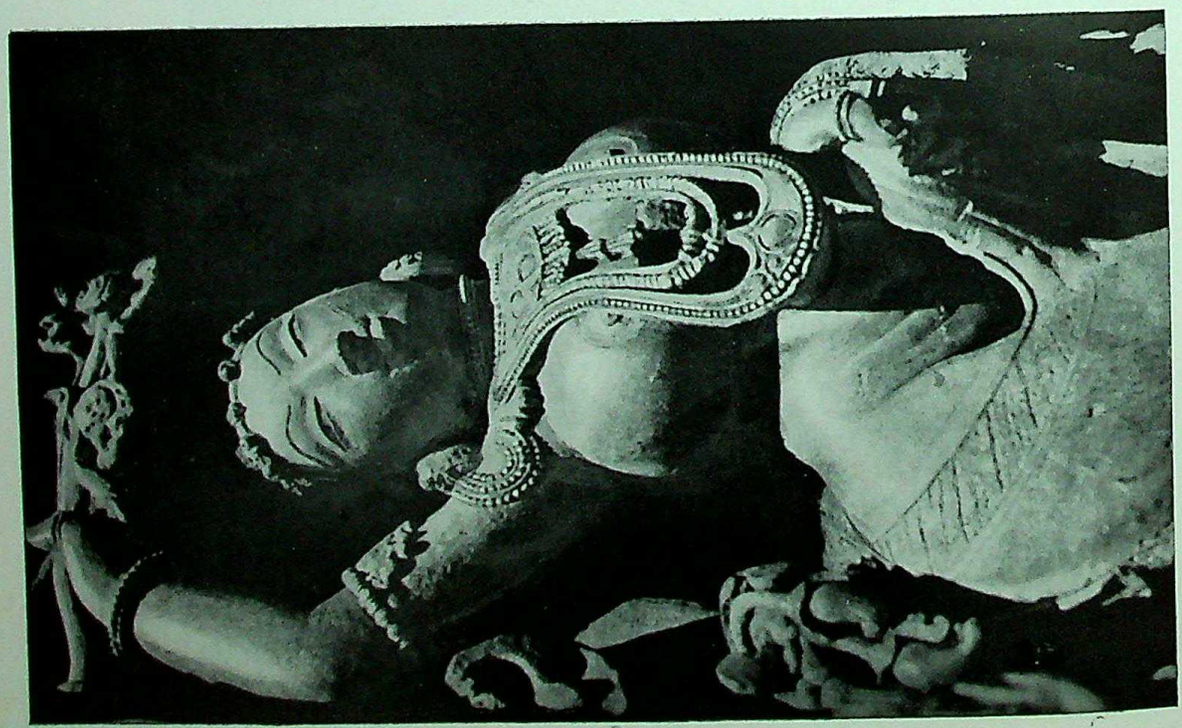


118 A CELESTIAL BEAUTY IN AN EXQUISITE DANCE POSE
Belur, Mysore : 12th Century A. D.
Photos : A. K. Banerji



117 A DANCER

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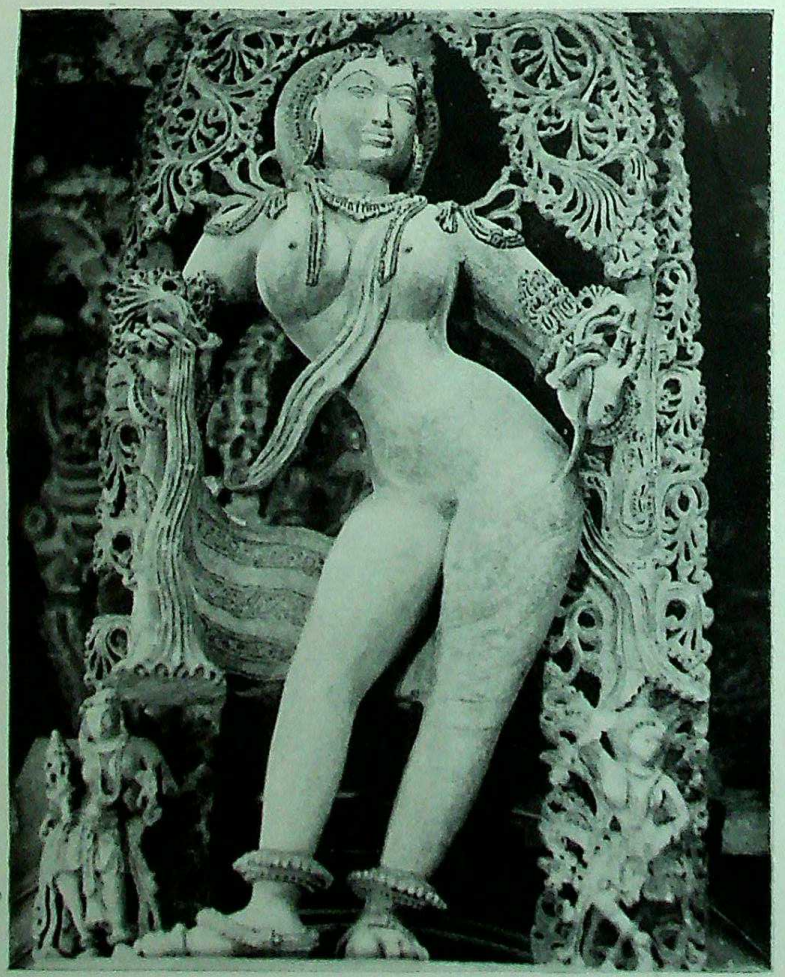
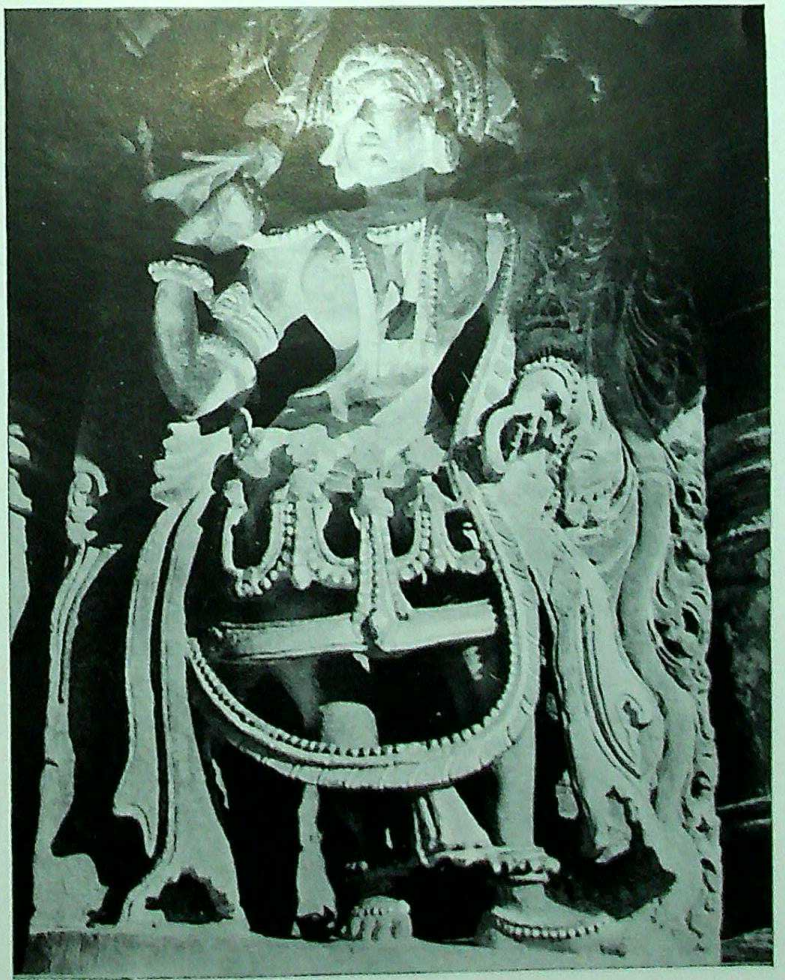


119 CELESTIAL BEAUTY FRESH AFTER BATH
Belur, Mysore: 12th Century A. D.



120 A COURTESAN
The love bird on her arm denotes free love.
Belur, Mysore: 12th Century A. D.

Photos: A. K. Banerji

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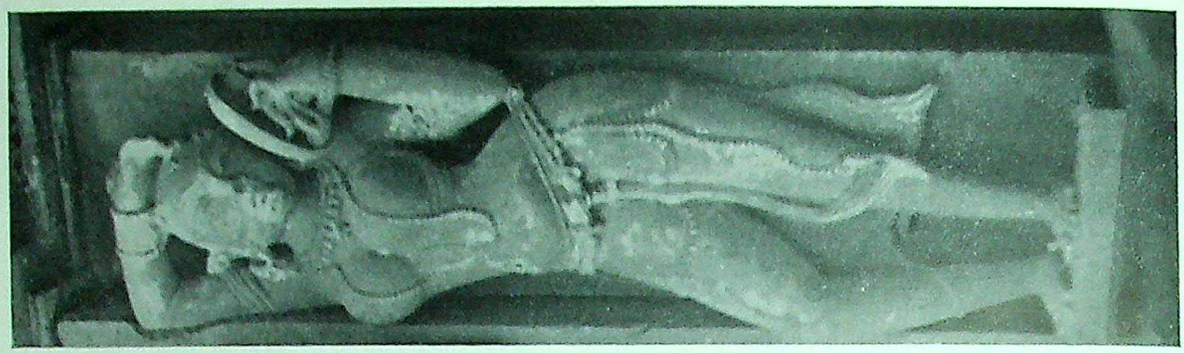
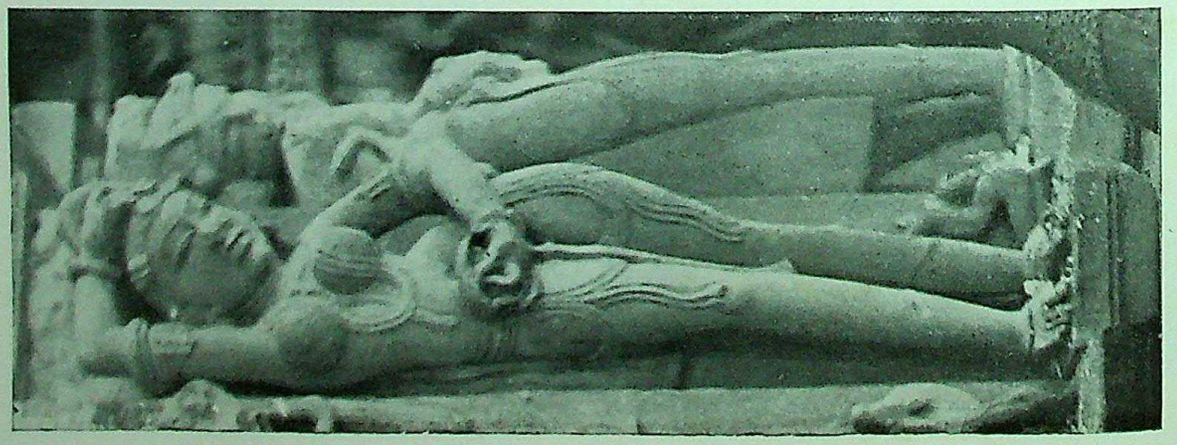


123 TOILET

122 THE KISS

Sculptures from Khajuraho, 11th Century A. D.
Photos : E. S. Mahalingam



121 A DANCE POSE

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She stopped, and counterfeiting pain, exclaimed,
'My foot is wounded by this prickly grass.'
Then glancing at me tenderly, she feigned
Another charming pretext for delay,
Pretending that a bush had caught her robe,
And turned as if to disentangle it.

Dushyanta is too overcome with love of Shakuntala to leave the forest without meeting the maiden again. He finds an excuse to leave his camp and seek the welfare of the hermits residing in the neighbourhood. Musing to himself and dreaming of the fair maid of the woods, he wanders over the haunts of the maidens in the fond hope of coming across Shakuntala. Nor is he disappointed ; for he finds Shakuntala in the company of her two maids, reclining on a rock strewn with flowers. She looks distressed, and her garb is in disorder, and the two maids are fanning her. The king, dazed by the beauty of her youthful, lovely limbs and the heaving bosom partly exposed, retains sufficient sense to hide himself. He is anxious to know the cause of Shakuntala's distress. The weather no doubt, is warm, but Dushyanta cannot believe that a maiden brought up to bear that climate could fall ill because of the sun. He hopefully fears that her troubles are nearer the heart than the skin.

The maiden's spotless bosom is overspread
With cooling balsam ; on her slender arm
Her only bracelet, twined with lotus-stalks,
Hangs loose and withered ; her recumbent form
Expresses languor. Ne'er could noon day sun
Inflict such fair disorder on a maid,
No, love, and love alone is here to blame.

The king with the greatest interest and expectation listens stealthily to the conversation between Shakuntala and her companions. Shakuntala looks much confused obviously because she was keeping an unutterable secret which she dares not impart even to Priyamvada and Anasuya from whom, uptil now, she had concealed nothing. The clever girls, however, from the circumstance of her strange behaviour from the day of her meeting Dushyanta, rightly conclude that the royal hunter is the cause of her distress. After much coaxing and presuasion they wrench the guarded secret from Shakuntala's lips. Once the secret is out, the maiden completely surrenders herself to her companions' mercy. For says she :

"You must consent, then, my dear friends, to contrive some means by which I may find favour with the king or you will have ere long to assist in my funeral."

The three fair conspirators then put their heads together and decide to pen a love note to the king, and Priyamvada and Anasuya approve of the following lines Shakuntala composed :

I know not the secret thy bosom conceals,
Thy form is not near me to gladden my sight ;
But sad is the tale that my fever reveals
Of the love that consumes me by day and by night.

The king could not bear it any longer. He comes out of his hiding place and boldly advances towards the confused maidens. He tells Shakuntala :

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Nay, Love does but warm thee, fair maiden-thy frame
Only droops like the bud in the glare of the noon ;
But me he consumes with a pitiless flame,
As the beams of the day-star destroy the pale moon.

The king thus openly and unexpectedly proclaiming his love for Shakuntala, her clever companions drag her into conversation with the king. Shakuntala, becoming bolder, rebukes her companions for detaining the king by their idle talk, when the ladies of the royal harem were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the king. Dushyanta notices Shakuntala's concern for the ladies of his palace and tells her :

Sweet maiden, banish from thy mind the thought
That I could love another. Thou dost reign
Supreme without a rival in my heart
And I am thine alone ; disown me not,
Else must I die a second deadlier death
Killed by thy words, as erst by Kama's shafts.

The two companions of Shakuntala now invent an excuse and depart leaving the lovers together. Shakuntala, confused, tries to stop them, but laughing they go their way consigning her to the care of her royal lover. Dushyanta, at last finding the great opportunity he had all along been looking for, addresses the maiden in terms of passionate love. In Shakuntala there is now a conflict between duty and personal inclinations. She is genuinely troubled, especially as the king was infringing the rules of decorum.

Dushyanta, however, has a ready answer in support of his behaviour. Says he :

In Indra's heaven, so at least 'tis said,
No nuptial rites prevail, nor is the bride
Led to the altar by her future spouse ;
But all in secret does the bridegroom plight
His troth and each unto the other vow
Mutual allegiance. Such espousals, too,
Are authorised on earth, and many daughters
Of royal saints thus wedded to their lords
Have still received their fathers' benison.

Before things could go further, Gautami, the venerable matron of the hermitage comes on the scene, and Dushyanta goes into hiding. The persevering prince got his chance later on, and the resistance of the maiden broken, he was united to her in Gandharva rite (a secret form of love-marriage without witnesses or officiating priest recognized as valid for kings).

Kalidasa's description of Shakuntala's behaviour on the dawning of love is typical of maidens of the higher, orthodox classes of Hindus even at present. Girls among the orthodox are brought up under strict parental authority and from time immemorial it has been considered immodest for a girl to express her love for a man by word of mouth. A girl's approval or dislike of a man is usually found out by her general behaviour. Only when hard pressed by her mother or cornered by her lady companions will a maiden give expression to her secret. Discerning parents and elderly ladies usually discover a girl's inclinations by watching her behaviour in the presence of her suitor and in his absence ;

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that is, when they wish to ascertain her opinion in the matter. In most of the arranged matches, the girls have, however, little or no say. When a marriage proposal is finally accepted, the shy bride-to-be becomes a constant object of teasing by her girl friends and relatives, who drag into conversation the name of the intended bride-groom. The modest maiden, when her outrageous friends indulge in this kind of fun, often leaves them in ostentatious disgust.

Another scene in Kalidasa's play typical of present day customs is the departing of Shakuntala from the hermitage to her husband's palace. Dushyanta, as the reader is probably aware, never returned to the hermitage once he took leave of Shakuntala. Shakuntala began to show signs of pregnancy and her foster father Kanva decided to send her to the palace of her husband in the company of two hermits and a matron. The departing of a newly married girl to the house of her husband is a matter of much lament among the Hindus. The girl herself is greatly distressed by the fact that she is leaving for good the home of her childhood for a distant place to live among strangers. The parents who had pampered the child all along are also much affected by her departure. The mother usually bursts into sobs while the father, as becoming a man, bears the bereavement with a show of fortitude although his eyes shed tears. The pathos of the scene is much heightened if the girl is their only daughter.

Shakuntala, though the foster child of Kanva, was the pet of the hermits, and even the animals of the hermitage loved her. She, on her part, had grown up with the plants, trees and animals of the hermitage and was greatly attached to them, and to the hermits and her two young companions.

The time at last comes for Shakuntala to take farewell of the home of her childhood. Kanva, though a hermit and as such detached from domestic sentiments, is much distressed. When Shakuntala appears before him, dressed for her journey to the city, the old hermit could hardly speak for emotion. For,

> This day my loved one leaves me, and my heart
> Is heavy with its grief : the stream of sorrow
> Choked at the source, repress my faltering voice.
> I have no words to speak ; mine eyes are dimmed
> By the dark shadow of the thoughts that rise
> Within my soul. If such the force of grief
> In an old hermit parted from his nurseling,
> What anguish must the stricken parent feel
> Bereft for ever of an only daughter !

Kanva blesses Shakuntala and addresses the trees and plants of the hermitage that stood still as if stunned by the impending bereavement :

> Hear me, ye trees that surround our hermitage !
> Shakuntala ne'er moistened in the stream
> Her own parched lips, till she had fondly poured
> Its purest water on your thirsty roots ;
> And oft, when she would fain have decked her hair
> With your thick-clustering blossom, in her love
> She robbed you not e'en of a single flower.
> Her highest joy was ever to behold

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The early glory of your opening buds :
Oh, then, dismiss her with a kind farewell !
This very day she quits her father's home,
To seek the palace of her wedded lord.
(The note of the Koil is heard)
Hark ! heard'st thou not the answer of the trees,
Our sylvan sisters, warbled in the note
Of the melodious Koil ? They dismiss
Their dear Shakuntala with loving wishes.

Shakuntala takes farewell of the trees and lingers lovingly in a jasmine bower which she used to water daily with great care. The animals and birds of the hermitage scent tragedy in the air and they watch Shakuntala. Priyamvada speaks :

In sorrow for thy loss, the herd of deer
Forget to browse ; the peacock on the lawn
Ceases its dance ; the very trees around us
Shed their pale leaves, like tears upon the ground.

At last Shakuntala with a supreme effort bids every one farewell. She consigns her jasmine bower to the care and protection of her two friends Priyamvada and Anasuya. Both these maidens burst out into tears and ask their beloved Shakuntala :

"And to whose charge do you leave us, dearest ? Who will care for us when you are gone ? "

Old Kanva, himself in tears, makes a brave attempt to pacify the girls and asks them to rejoice on the occasion of the bride's departure for her husband's house. Shakuntala, while taking leave of her companions, feels herself drawn by her clothes and looking round finds her little pet fawn clinging endearingly to her as if imploring leave to follow her. She becomes desperate and tells the fawn :

My poor little fawn, dost thou ask to follow an unhappy wretch who hesitates not to desert her companions ? When thy mother died, soon after thy birth, I supplied her place, and reared thee with my own hand ; and now that thy second mother is about to leave thee who will care for thee ? My father, be thou a mother to her. My child, go back, and be a daughter to my father."

Kanva replies :

Weep not, my daughter, check the gathering tear
That lurks beneath thine eyelid, ere it flow
And weaken thy resolve ; be firm and true—
True to thyself and me ; the path of life
Will lead over hill and plain, over rough and smooth
And all must feel the steepness of the way ;
Though rugged be thy course, press boldly on.

The party now leave the hermitage. Kanva and the friends of Shakuntala accompany her to the nearest stream on the way, where, after much expression of grief they embrace Shakuntala and take final farewell of her. Kanva gives his daughter this parting advice :

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Honour thy betters ; ever be respectful
To those above thee ; and should others share
Thy husband's love, ne'er yield thyself a prey
To jealousy ; but ever be a friend,
A loving friend, to those who rival thee
In his affections. Should thy wedded lord
Treat thee with harshness, thou must never be
Harsh in return, but patient and submissive.
Be to thy menials courteous, and to all
Placed under thee, considerate and kind.
Be never self-indulgent, but avoid
Excess in pleasure ; and when fortune smiles
Be not puffed up. Thus to thy husband's house
Wilt thou a blessing prove, and not a curse.

Kanva at last tears himself from his daughter and walks homeward. His sorrow is not unmixed with a sense of relief. While walking back he muses to himself :

A daughter is a loan—a precious jewel
Lent to a parent till her husband claim her.
And now to her rightful lord and master
I have delivered her, my burdened soul
Is lightened, and I seem to breathe more freely.

This scene is enacted, though not with the same poignancy, in every orthodox Hindu household to this day when the bride, after marriage, is taken away to her husband's home. Thus the mental condition of the Hindu bride leaving her parent's house after marriage is quite different from that of the merry European or American girl going out on her honeymoon trip.

Second in renown only to Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti was a great poet in his time. Like Kalidasa he wrote plays, but he is not widely known as a love poet but as a master in describing the weird and the terrible. But Bhavabhuti can be tender and lyrical. His description of Madhava meeting Malati in *Malati Madhava* is worth quoting :

One day by curiosity impelled
I sought the temple of the god of love.
There I roved to and fro, glancing around,
Till weary with my wandering I stood
Close to a pool that laved a Vakul tree,
In the courtyard and precincts of the temple.
The tree's sweet blossoms wooed a swarm of bees
To cull their nectar ; and in idleness
To while away the time, I laid me down
And gathered round me all the fallen flowers
To weave a garland, when there issued forth
From the interior fane, a lovely maid.

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Stately her gait, yet graceful as the banner
Waved by victorious Love o'er prostrate men
Her garb with fitting ornaments embellished
Bespoke a youthful princess, her attendants
Moved proudly as became their noble rank ;
She seemed a treasury of all graces,
Or beauty's storehouse, where collected shone
A bright assemblage of all fairest things
To frame a perfect form ; or rather she
The very guardian goddess of Loves' shrine ;
Or did the great creator mould her charms
From some of Nature's loveliest materials—
The moon, the lotus-stalk, and sweetest nectar ?
I looked and in an instant both my eyes
Seemed bathed with rapture and inmost soul
Was drawn towards her unresistingly,
Like iron by the iron loving magnet.*

Poet Bana, in his romance *Kadambari* gives some interesting descriptions of women. His tendency to wild exaggeration and far fetched similes may sound strange to English readers, but Bana's style was exceedingly popular in his time and is even now imitated by writers in India as an orthodox form. Besides, what may appear strained and even fantastic in the English translation will sound almost natural in Sanskrit, because of the peculiarities and associations of this language. The following description of a Chandala (low caste) maiden who appeared before a king in his court will be of interest as typical of Bana's style :

"She seemed by the darkness of her hue to imitate Krishna when he guilefully assumed a woman's attire to take away the Amrita seized by the demons.† She was, as it were, a doll of saphire walking alone ; and over the blue garment which reached to her ankle, there fell a veil of red silk, like evening sunshine falling on a blue lotus. The circle of her cheek was whitened by the ear-ring that hung from one ear, like the face of night inlaid with the rays of the rising moon ; she had a tawny *tilaka* of *gorocana*, as if it were a third eye like Parvati in mountaineer's attire, after the fashion of the garb of Shiva.

"She was like Sri (the goddess of beauty and wealth), darkened by the saphire glory of Narayana reflected on the robe of her breasts ; or like Rati, stained by smoke which rose as Madana was burnt by the fire of wrathful Shiva ; or like Yamuna, fleeing in fear of being drawn along by the ploughshare of wild Balarama ; or from the rich lac that turned her lotus feet into budding shoots, like Durga, with her feet crimsoned by the blood of the Asura Mahisha she had just trampled upon.

"Her nails were rosy from the pink glow of her fingers ; the mosaic pavement seemed too hard for her touch, and she came forward placing her feet like tender twigs upon the ground.

"Like autumn, she opened her lotus eyes ; like the rainy season, she had cloudy tresses ; like the circle of the Malaya hills she was wreathed with sandal ; like the zodiac,

* Tr. Monier Williams.

† The story will be found in the author's *Epics, Myths and Legends of India.*

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she was decked with starry gems; like Sri, she had the fairness of a lotus in her hand; like the moon she entranced the heart; like a forest she was endowed with living beauty; like the child of a goddess she was claimed by no tribe; like sleep she charmed the eyes; as a lotus pool in a wood is troubled by elephants, so was she dimmed by her Matanga birth; like a spirit, she might not be touched; like a letter she gladdened the eyes alone; like the blossoms of spring, she lacked the jati flower; her slender waist, like the line of Love's bow, could be spanned by the hands; with her curly hair, she was like the Lakshmi of the Yaksha king of Alaka." *

Another classical romance which has much literary merit and is popular among the Hindus is *Dasa Kumara Charita* or *Story of Ten Princes* by Dandin. Here is a description of the belle of Avanti, one of Dandin's heroines:

"She shone a creation of Love. Yes, Love had fashioned a paragon of a woman, as if he wished, in wistful memory of Charm, to image forth this duplicate. He formed her feet from the sweetness of two autumn lilies in his own pleasure pool; the languid grace of her gait from the course of a wanton swan down a long lake in a planted garden; her calves from a quiver curve; her comely thighs from the shapeliness of two plantain stems by the door of a summer house; her generous hips from the sweep of conquering chariots; her navel (which seemed an eddy in Ganges' stream) from the semblance of an early flowering ornamental lotus bud; her three plicatures from the ordered rise of a palace stairway; her capillation from the lovely sheen of bees that cling from Love's bowstring; her breasts from the beauty of two full golden bowls; arms from the delicacy of vines in a bower; her neck from the symmetry of a conch of victory; her lip, like the bimba fruit, from the redness of mango flowers that maidens fondly wear above the ear; her sweet smile from the splendour of Love's flower-arrows; her every word from the witchery of the soft song of Love's first messenger, the cuckoo; the breath of her sigh from the gentleness of the southern breeze, leader of all Love's soldiers; her eyes from the pride of two fishes figured on his conquering banner; her brows from the curve of his bow; her face from the spotless enchantment of Love's first friend, the moon; her hair from the similitude of a pet peacock's fan. Then he bathed the image in sandal paste, mingled with essence of honey and musk, and polished it with camphor dust." †

This is typical of descriptions of their heroines by some Sanskrit writers. In their wild love of exaggerating their heroines' charms, the writers use fantastic similes and metaphors, and no description of a presentable girl is considered complete without dragging in the lotus, the lily, the bimba fruit, the moon, Love's bows and arrows and the better looking of the goddesses of the pantheon. This style is often imitated by writers at present and there is a large number of readers who appreciate it.

Among amorously inclined Hindu poets there has been a literary fad of composing eight stanzas or verses in honour of some beautiful lady or describing love in an impersonal sort of way, and these stanzas or verses are called *Sringara Ashtaka* (love eight). We shall quote a few verses from the *Ashtaka* of Mayura. This *Ashtaka* is said to have brought upon the poet the curse of leprosy. The poet, so goes the story, was so overcome by the beauty of his own daughter that he described her in a lascivious manner in the *Ashtaka*, and the young lady enraged at the incestuous leaning of her sire cursed him to become a leper. Mayura repented of his unholy passion and in expiation of the sinful *Ashtaka* composed a *Sataka* (one hundred verses) in praise of Surya (the sun god) who, pleased with the hundred verses, cured the poet of the malady caused by the eight.

* Tr. C. M. Ridding.

† Tr. Arthur W. Ryder.

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Some of the verses of the *Mayura Ashtaka* are as follows :

Who is this timid gazelle ? Why has this gazelle with a burden of firm, swelling breasts,

With roving glance, and slender waist, gone forth from the frightened herd ?

Drunk with love, unsteady of steps, she totters as if fallen from the temple of a rutting lord of elephants.

Beholding this divine form, adorned with beautiful, well-shaped limbs, even an old man becomes youthful as Kama.

Who is this beauty, her face shining like the full moon, advancing along the path, in the full bloom of youth,

Drunk with love and sleep, her eyes rolling, her lips full and red like the ripe bimba fruits,

Her locks in bewildering disorder, wounded by her lover's nails, and torn to pieces by his teeth ?

Has this fair maiden been loved by a demon, and has he, imitating tiger sport, enjoyed her ?

Has this maiden been ravished, and then let go ? With wandering glance, and garments clinging to her perspiring limbs,

She flits, at dawn, like a fawn, timid and frightened. What bee has sipped the nectar of her blooming lips ?

By whom has Paradise been enjoyed today ? Whom has Kama, once slain by Shiva's eye, blessed today ?

With her hand holding her heavy hair adorned with flowers crushed in the game of love,

Her upper garment and loose girdle gathered in her right, her hair dishevelled and face swollen and languid, her passion sated,

Here she comes from the private chamber, having yielded to the power of love, longing for the breeze.

Ancient Hindus were ardent admirers of wild forest scenery and the poetry they have left us is full of charming descriptions of the beauty and grandeur of the great forests of India. There were regular colonies of hermits in ancient India who lived in the forests, and the better class of poets lived a good part of their life in these colonies in intimate contact with nature. Nothing in the world attracted these bards so forcefully as the wild charm of nature, especially during spring, with the trees in full blossom, lakes sparkling with lilies and lotuses, the birds and animals seeking their mates and the whole forest resounding with the hum of beetles and bees and the music of singing birds. This atmosphere has all along been considered by the Hindus the inspiring source of love, and their great love stories have forest scenery as the background. The wild, primeval forest, free from the petty moral conceptions of mortal man, was thought the ideal place where the hero or the heroine of the bard could do daring acts of love which would lead to censure if committed in man-made village or city.

Men who, while hunting game, strayed into wild woods teeming with flower-choked trees and resounding with the hum of bees and the notes of the Koil are said to have fallen into paroxysms of passion and done violence to their own persons. King Pandu, father of the five Pandava princes, died in the arms of his wife Madri in a forest into which he had

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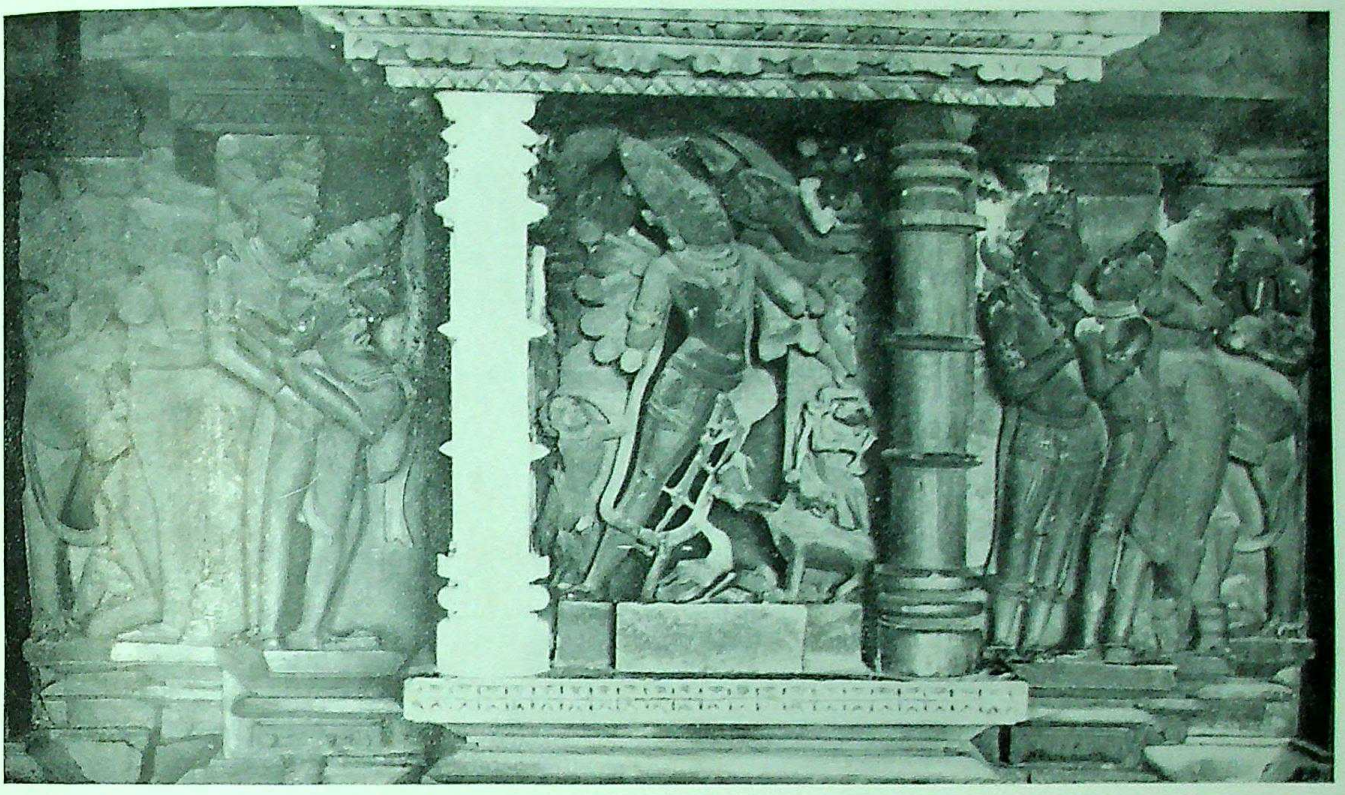

124 TRIPURARI

A warlike manifestation of Shiva, with decorative sculptures on the south facade of the sanctum of Viswanath Temple, Khajuraho : 11th Century A. D.

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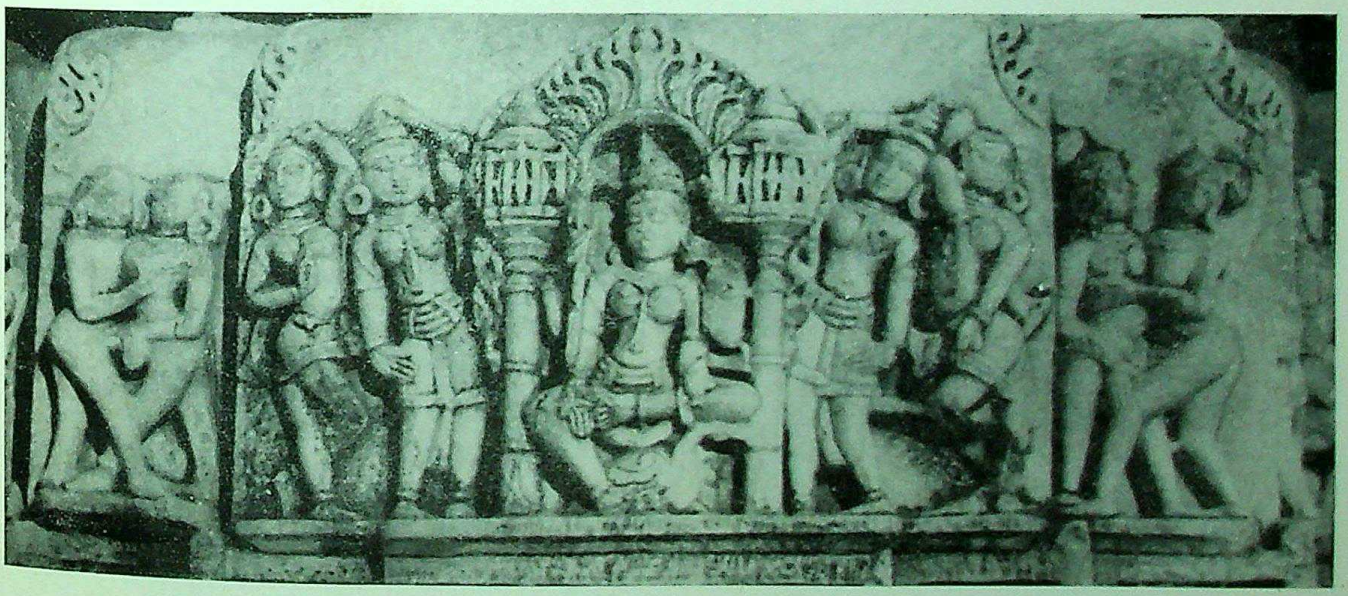

125 DECORATIVE SCULPTURES OF LOVE SCENES

Ranekpur Temple, Palanpur : 12th Century A. D. *Photo : K. L. Kothary*

पुस्तकालय
गुरुकुल काँगड़ी

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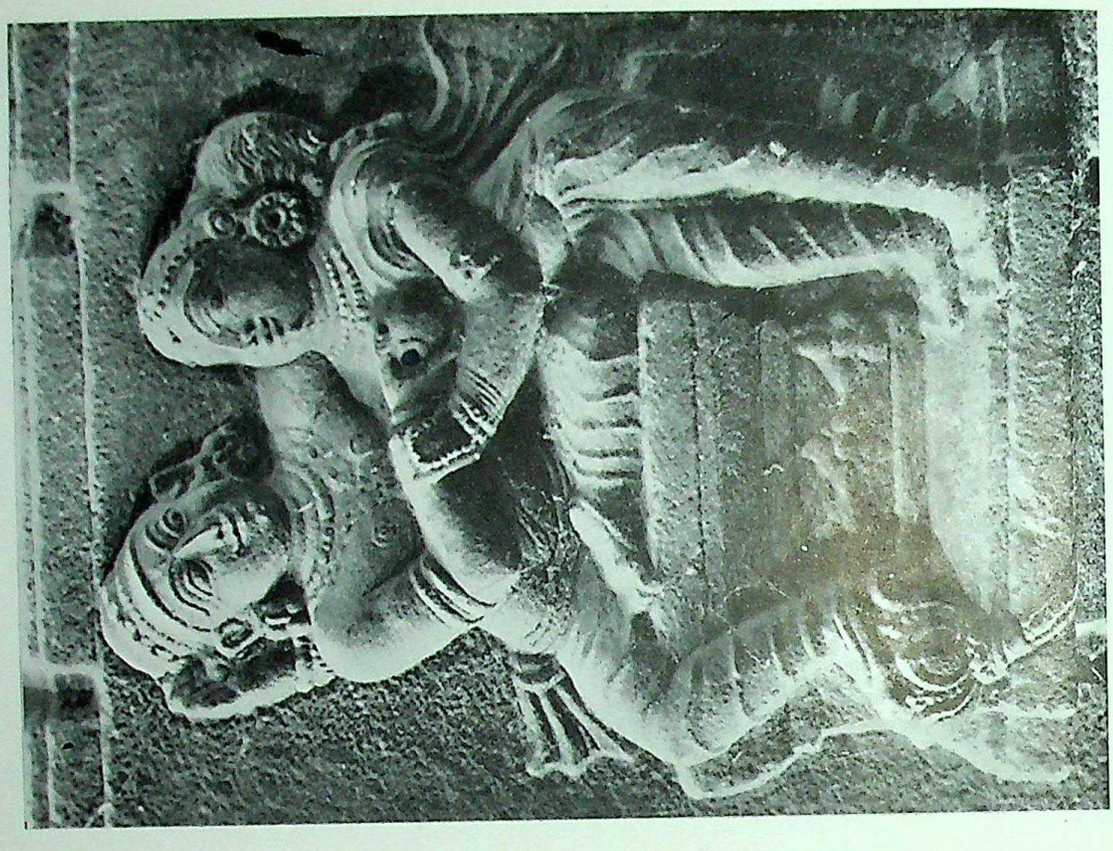
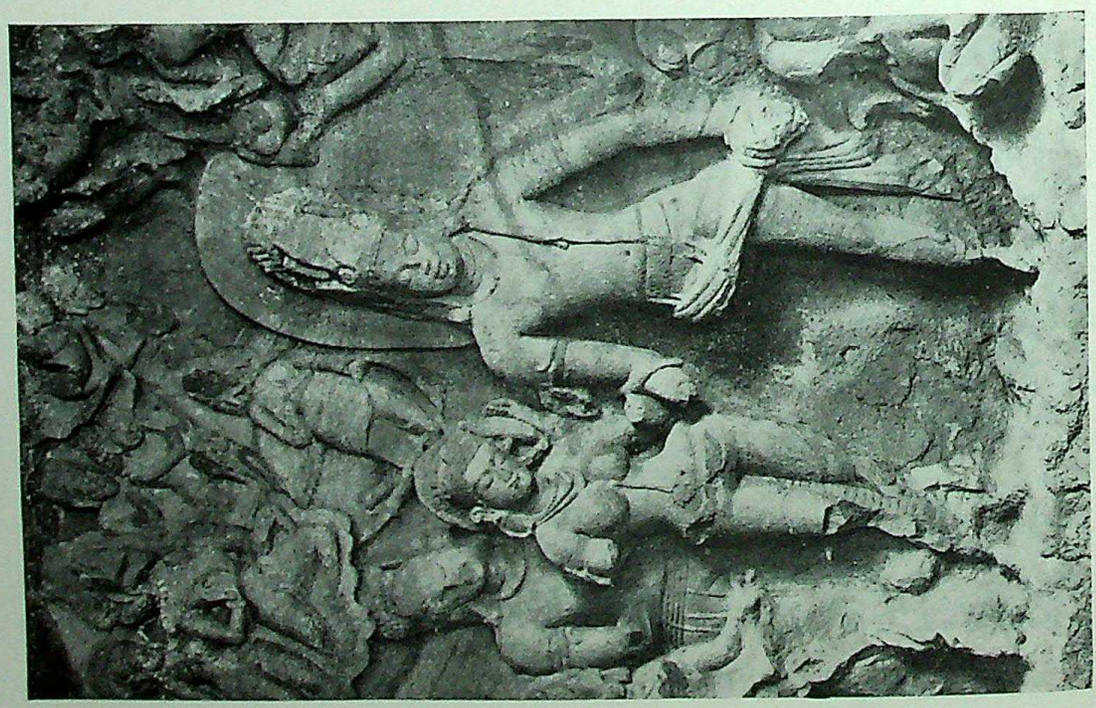


127 LOVE SCENE
From a pillar, Ramaswami Temple, Kumbhakonam, S. India
17th Century A. D
Photo : K. Arunachalam



126 MARRIAGE OF SHIVA AND PARVATI
Elephanta Caves, Bombay : 9th Century A. D.
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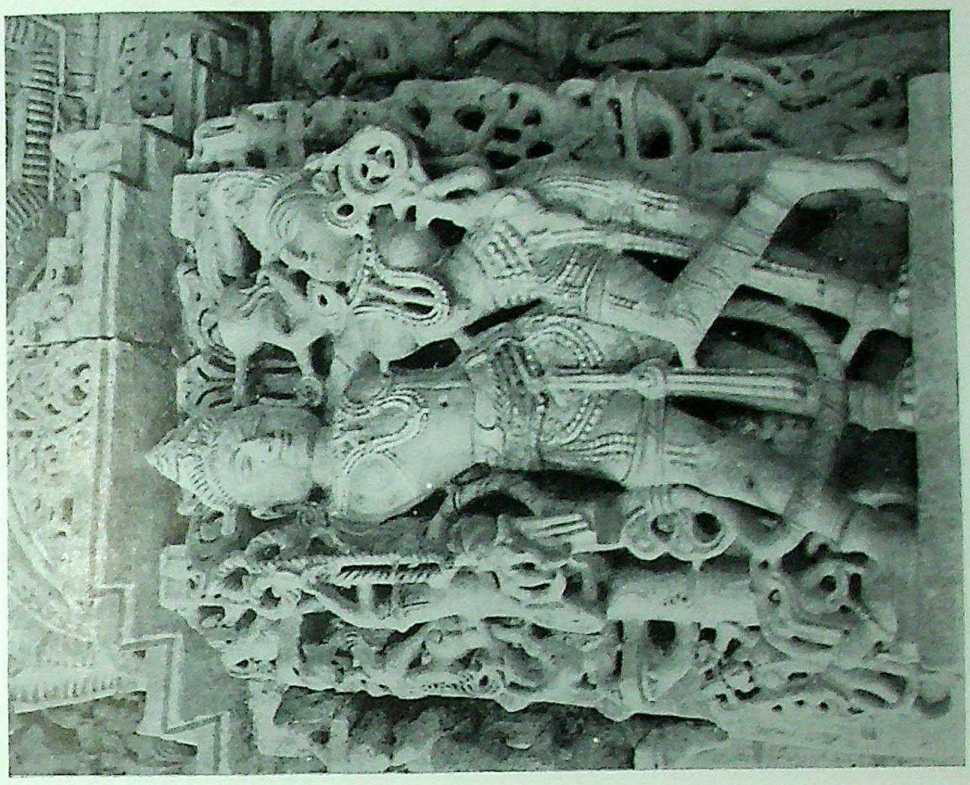
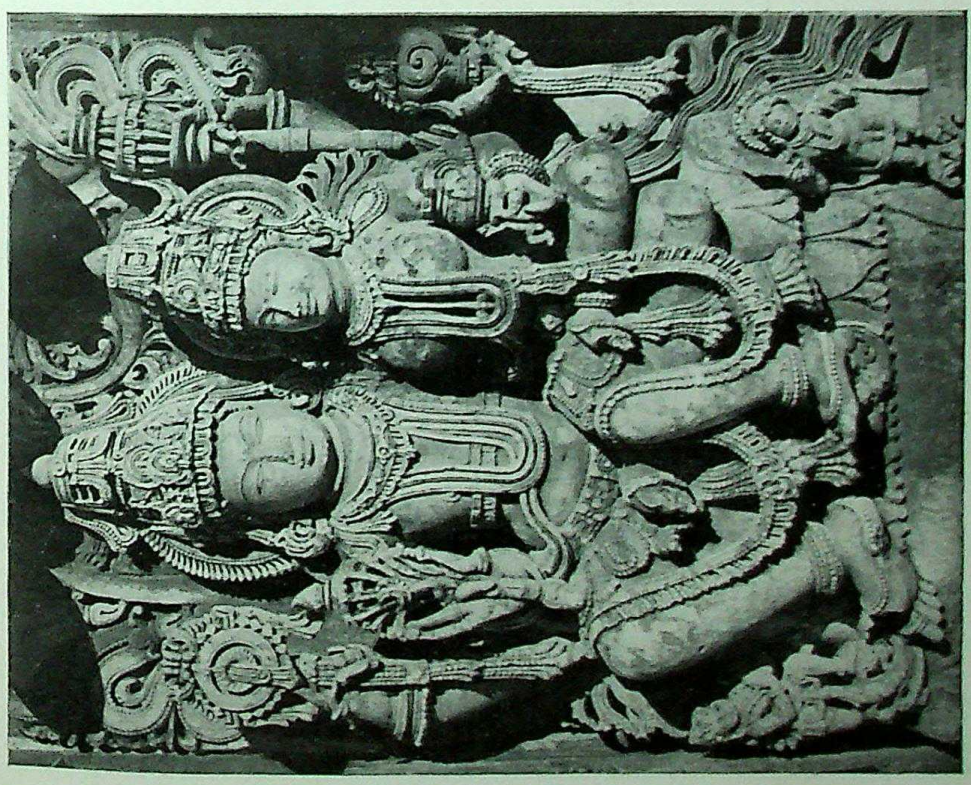


129 ANOTHER REPRESENTATION OF SHIVA AND PARVATI
Dilwara Temple, Mt. Abu : 11th Century A. D.
Photo : A. K. Banerji



128 SHIVA AND PARVATI, THE IDEAL COUPLE OF THE HINDU PANTHEON
Halebid, Mysore : 12th Century A. D.

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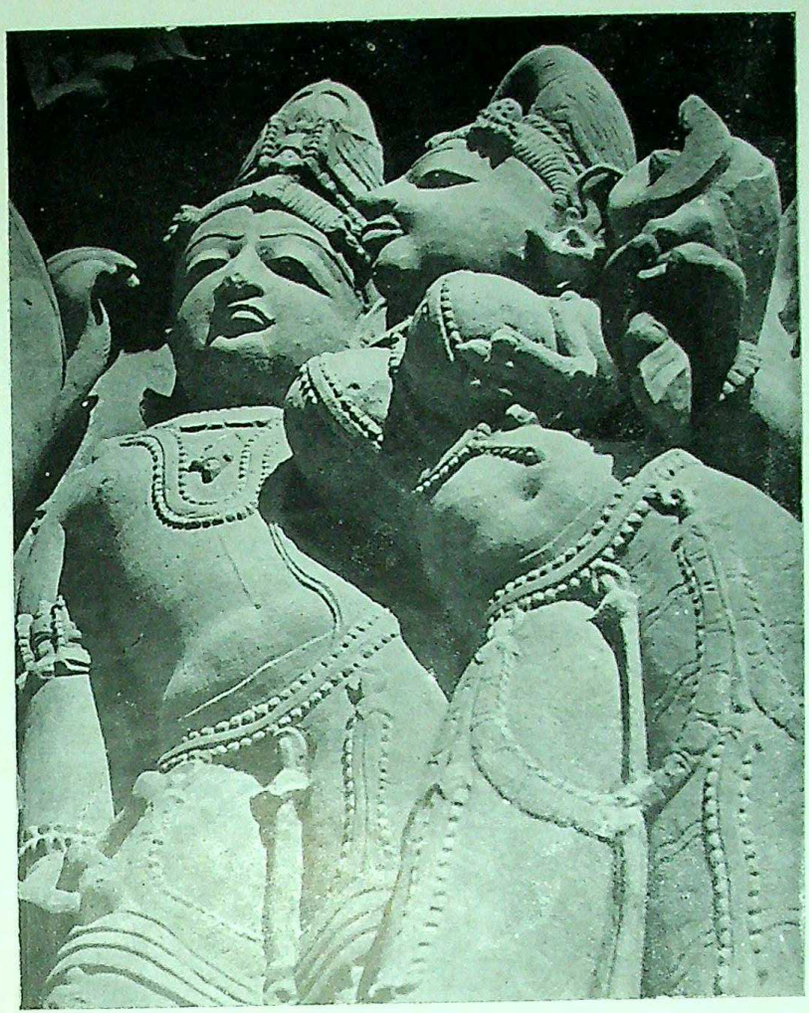
130 A WOMAN OF FREE LOVE
With the love bird in her hand. The Image is sculptured slanting
Belur : 12th Century A. D.



131 SHIVA AND HIS WIFE PARVATI IN AN UNUSUAL POSE
Khajuraho : 11th Century A. D.

Photos : A. K. Banerji

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gone for an excursion with his two wives and five children. Pandu was under the curse of a sage who had condemned him to die in the arms of a woman, and the king had studiously kept himself aloof from the company of women including his wives, Madri and Kunti. These ladies were also aware of the curse and took particular care not to tempt the king, and not to be alone with him. But all this did not avail on the fatal day.

In the spring which maddens all creatures with love, Pandu with Madri roamed in the woods teeming with blossoming trees and plants. His eyes were delighted to behold the Palashas, mangoes, Champakas, Paripardakas and the Karnikaras, the leaves scarcely visible for the rich luxuriant blossoms and the myriads of black bees clustering round the flowers. He saw the Parijata tree with the Kokila birds pouring forth their melodies from within thick foliage, the echoes of their sweet music filling the forest. The branches of the trees were drooping with the weight of flowers and fruits. The trees stood by lakes full of lotuses and lilies.

"Seeing all this, king Pandu unmindful of the fatal curse, fell an easy prey to the flower shafts of the god of love. Supremely joyous, blissfully ignorant of the impending doom, the king roamed the delightful forest like a celestial with his youthful, beautiful wife beside him, lightly clad in a thin robe. Seeing the lovely Madri thus attired, the king's passion flamed up like a forest fire. Alone with her in the wild, raging charms of the forest, the king was taken by an overpowering desire to embrace the lotus-eyed Madri, and before she could stop him, the maddened king, unrestrained by the fear of the curse, impelled by fate, forcibly sought the embrace of his wife as if to put an end to himself. His reason clouded by the Destroyer, the king, intoxicated by love of his wife, lost his life in the arms of Madri. Thus the virtuous king succumbed to the inevitable influence of all-devouring Time, while in the act of embracing his wife." *

Madri burst into violent sobs, and Kunti with her children ran towards her. As they came near, Madri cried piteously to Kunti : "Pray, come alone ; let the children stay back. See what a terrible thing has happened."

Kunti saw her husband lying dead on the ground with Madri beside him. Great was her sorrow and she addressed Madri moved by affliction not unmixed with jealousy :

"This self-disciplined hero was constantly watched by me with care. He was well aware of the curse of the sage, and then how did this thing come to pass ? O Madri, this great king, our beloved husband ought to have been protected and guided by you, but you enticed him into solitude and into ruin. My lord was always melancholy, burdened with the ill-effects of the curse of the sage ; then how was he roused to joy and merriment by you ? But O princess, you are greatly favoured on this day, for you have seen the face of our lord in gladness and in joy which I have never witnessed all my life."

Several similar instances of forest scenery inciting men and women to madness in love can be cited from Sanskrit literature. A good part of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* deal with the life of hermits and wandering heroes in the forests, and the Hindu poet is never so well at home as when dealing with forest life. The *Ramayana* is particularly rich in beautiful descriptions of the great forests of the South, and a most pleasing picture of lake Pampa, considered a classic, is to be found in the *Kishkinda Kanda* of this epic.

* Free rendering from the *Mahabharata*.

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Chapter Nine

LITERATURE ON LOVE

The Hindus divide the prime objects of life into four : Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Dharma means religious and social duty, Artha acquisition of wealth, Kama pursuit of pleasure especially of sex, and Moksha salvation.

Kama, in its broader sense, includes all pleasures a person is capable of experiencing through the senses. A good meal, thus, comes under the category of Kama ; but Hindu hedonists maintain that there is no pleasure equal to that of love, no bliss greater than the ecstatic all-powerful physical union between man and woman. Hindu writers on erotics have studied the subject with a thoroughness only they are capable of, and in their scientific detachment are not plagued with the notions of decency which often disturb the equanimity of Western sexologists.

The literature on love is believed to be of divine origin. Brahma, the creator, wrote a work of 100,000 chapters dealing with the three prime objects of life, Dharma, Artha and Kama. Those portions of the work pertaining to Dharma were summarized by Manu, the mythical Hindu law-giver, and handed down to mankind in the form of the well-known code that goes by his name. Brahaspati, probably the well-known materialist, condensed those chapters of Brahma's work dealing with Artha into a handy volume which is not available now. And Nandi, Shiva's bovine charger, abridged Brahma's treatise on Kama and wrote a book of 1,000 chapters ; this is as it should be, for Shiva is the most virile god of the Hindu pantheon and the strong sex nature of bulls is well-known.

Nandi's work was found too voluminous for mortals and the sage Swetaketu, son of Uddalaka, summarized it into a book of 500 chapters. Even this was unreasonably lengthy, and a Pundit of Panchala country named Babhravya re-wrote the whole work in 150 chapters, grouping the subject into seven classes, *i.e.* : (1) General, (2) Sexual union, (3) Courtship, (4) Married love, (5) Love out of wedlock, (6) Venal love, and (7) Secret instructions.

Each of these seven sections, again, was worthy of special attention. So Charayana wrote a book on the first section, Suvarunabha on the second, Ghotamukha on the third, Gorandeya on the fourth, Gonikaputra on the fifth, Dattakacharya on the sixth and Kuchumara on the seventh. While little is known of the other six authors, of Dattakacharya we are told that he took particular care to obtain intimate knowledge of the subject and lived among the courtesans of Pataliputra who commissioned him to write a text book on the profession for the use of novices.

None of the books so far mentioned has come down to us. The earliest and most authoritative work extant is the *Kama Sutra* of Vatsyayana who, from a study of earlier works enriched probably by independent research, wrote a treatise dealing with the seven sections of Babhravya's work.

It is difficult to fix, with anything approaching exactness, the date of Vatsyayana. Hindu society, as depicted in his work, was a highly developed one with a luxury loving aristocracy exploiting all fields of pleasure, and Vatsyayana wrote mainly for the ease-loving, pleasure-seeking members of the aristocracy. For the development of such a refined class as the *Kama Sutra* portrays, internal peace for centuries, economic security and freedom from fear of foreign aggression must have been a necessary prelude. India rose to unprecedented heights of material prosperity and cultural refinement under the Guptas and it is probable that Vatsyayana lived in this era. Other works which mention the *Kama Sutra*

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also point to the soundness of this assumption and it is safe to surmize that Vatsyayana wrote his famous work in the third or fourth century of the Christian era.

The work as it stands at present is not, however, the same as was originally written by Vatsyayana. Hindu writers are somewhat unscrupulous in the matter of interpolation, and later authors freely wrote in the name of Vatsyayana and added considerably to the bulk of the original.

The *Kama Sutra*, in its present form, is a comprehensive work treating of sex and love from a purely mundane point of view. An exhaustive study of woman (and incidentally of man) with the object of obtaining the maximum pleasure out of her is what is mainly attempted in the *Kama Sutra*. Vatsyayana's hero is the wealthy man-about-town with no serious commitments in life but plenty of leisure to devote himself to the pursuit of pleasure. The fashionable men of the great cities of his time were patrons of art and letters and of courtesans who ruled high society. The *Kama Sutra*, of considerable intrinsic merit as a scientific work, was exceedingly popular among them and a knowledge of Vatsyayana was considered essential for artists, poets and sculptors, for kings and nobles, and ladies of fashion. Courtesans who aspired to fame assiduously studied the *Kama Sutra*. The nobles and the learned having set the fashion, the middle classes soon followed suit and Vatsyayana became a byword in India for everything erotic.

The authority of Vatsyayana is so great that he is considered a Rishi (inspired sage) by the Hindus and his work a piece of revelation. The *Kama Sutra* is often mentioned with scriptures like the *Dharma Shastras* (religious law codes) and the *Darsanas* (systems of philosophy). Myths and legends have also sprung up round the personality of Vatsyayana, almost deifying him. According to one story he was an ascetic and a celibate, and the *Kama Sutra* a work of pure inspiration. This is probably an exaggeration, but a careful study of the book must convince the impartial reader that it is written with scientific detachment. Vatsyayana himself says that his interest in the subject is objective, and when he deals with a perverted practice he takes pains to explain that he does not recommend it but treats it as a dietist who may 'describe in detail the taste, appearance and qualities, of dog's flesh with no intention of prescribing it as an item of diet'.

Next in importance to the *Kama Sutra* is the *Rati Rahasya* of Koka Pandit. Koka Pandit was a learned man who lived in the 11th century of the Christian era. His work is based on *Kama Sutra* but personal experience added considerably to his study. For unlike the saintly Vatsyayana, Koka Pandit was a man of the world who practised what he preached. He is reputed to have been an exceptionally virile man, and an amusing story of his virility is current in India. The pandit was a courtier and one day a naked Yakshi * burning with passion presented herself in the open court before the king. His Majesty wished to know of her the reason for this shameless behaviour; upon which the Yakshi explained that she had been wandering in vain through the fourteen worlds in search of a male who could give her satisfaction in sexual congress. Many men, gods, and even Rakshasas (evil spirits) had tried, she said, but failed ; and now she had come to the royal assembly to see if she could meet a male equal to the task. The king, master of many women as he was, shrank back from the Yakshi, and many a noble hung his head in shame. Our Koka Pandit now rose from the assembly and took the subject in hand. He led her to an ante-chamber, and before the court dispersed brought her back to the king well-clothed, a model of modesty, weeping with fatigue by repeated congress with the master of the art and science of love !

Koka Pandit's work was as popular with the Muslims as with the Hindus, and its translations and adaptations found their way into Muslim languages and paved the way for Kalyanmalla's famous work *Ananga Ranga*. Kalyanmalla was a Hindu who lived in

* A supernatural female, notorious for lustful activities.

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the 15th century under the patronage of a Muslim nobleman of the Lodi dynasty named Lad Khan, and he wrote the *Ananga Ranga* mainly for the benefit of his master. Because of Muslim patronage, the work got wide circulation. It is based on *Rati Rahasya* and *Kama Sutra* and free translations in Urdu, Persian and Arabic by Muslim writers often pass for original works.

Apart from these three important works, there are numerous other treatises on erotics which are quite popular. The *Kama Sutra* itself has five commentaries, *i.e.* 1) *Jayamangala* of Yasodhara, 2) Commentary by Bhaskara, 3) Commentary by Malla Deva, 4) *Kandarpachudamani* by king Virabhadra, and 5) Commentary by an anonymous writer. Further, Kshemendra, the well-known Kashmiri writer on erotics summarized the *Kama Sutra* in his *Vatsyayana Sutra Sara*.

The *Rati Rahasya* has four commentaries, *i.e.* by 1) Kanchi Natha, 2) Avancha Rama Chandra, 3) Kavi Prabhu, and 4) Harihara. Ancient Hindu writers had been in a peculiarly favourable position to study erotics. Polygyny was permissible and kings, nobles and wealthy merchants had a plurality of wives and well-stocked harems. A study of sex was not considered indecent or irreligious, and medieval society was ruled by courtesans who were considered the adornment of a city.

The author of *Ananga Ranga* observed that in this world of passing shadows there was but one reality, and that was the pleasure of the company of women. It was equal, he wrote, if not superior to the pleasure of union with Infinite, the bliss of the ascetic and the mystic.

Vatsyayana is more restrained in his praise of sexual pleasure. According to him, Kama is subordinate to Dharma and Artha, but he observes that it is for each individual to decide for himself which is the prime object of life. No two men are alike ; one man may be born with a preponderingly religious bent of mind and another with an equally strong leaning towards the acquisition of wealth or the pursuit of pleasure. Besides, the circumstances of birth and social status make men devote themselves to different objects in life. An heir to a throne or a courtesan's daughter cannot, for obvious reasons, be expected to prefer Dharma to Artha or Kama. Age also plays an important part in the choice of one's prime object of life. An old man of ninety cannot, it is plain, pursue the pleasures of life with the same vigour as a young man of twenty-five.

Vatsyayana has nothing but contempt for those lean ascetics who condemn all contact with women as sinful, and for fools who perpetually tell us that woman is a cause of misery. He is not perturbed by the babbling of those moralists who remind us of the fatal charms of Sita that ruined Ravana, and of Ahalya that brought disgrace on the king of the gods*. To them Vatsyayana says that because of the gluttony of certain misguided individuals no sane person should reject food as such, because of the destructive activities of incendiaries no intelligent person should reject fire as such. Gratification of the sex urge is as essential for the happiness and well-being of men as food. Over indulgence is fraught with dangers and is to be avoided ; but it is no argument in favour of celibacy or asceticism.

* The stories will be found in *Epics, Myths and Legends of India* (Taraporevala).

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Chapter Ten

LOVE AS A FINE ART

For a full appreciation of the joys of love, Vatsyayana considers a sound knowledge of sixty-four auxiliary arts a prelude if not a necessity. These sixty-four arts are: 1) vocal music, 2) instrumental music, 3) dancing, 4) painting, 5) art of decorating one's forehead, 6) floor decoration with white powder, 7) floor decoration with flowers, 8) colouring the teeth and painting lips and cheeks, 9) art of setting coloured stones on floor, 10) making bed for sleeping, 11) water sports, 12) bewitching by charms and spells, 13) making flower garlands, 14) arranging flowers as hair decoration, 15) selection of costumes for theatricals, 16) making ear-rings out of ivory, 17) preparaiton of scents and cosmetics, 18) renovating old garments by setting precious stones, 19) minor magic for amusement, 20) art of preparing mixtures for beautifying the skin and stimulating sexual desire, 21) sleight of hand, 22) preparation of beverages, 23) art of cooking, 24) needle work, 25) doll making, 26) mimicking the notes of the Vina and other musical instruments, 27) inventing and solving riddles, 28) verse competition, 29) recitation of verses difficult of pronunciation and meaning, 30) melodious recitation of verses from the epics, 31) acting, 32) skill in filling up blanks in a stanza from a given line, 33) furniture making from canes and reeds, 34) wood carving, 35) carpentry, 36) architecture, 37) evaluation of arcticles made of gold and precious stones, 38) alchemy, 39) tinting crystals, 40) horticulture, 41) training of fighting animals and birds, 42) training parrots to talk and using them for conveying secret messages, 43) massage of the body and limbs, 44) the art of gestures, 45) use of code languages, 46) study of languages, 47) floral decoration of vehicles, horses and elephants, 48) knowledge of omens, 49) making of toy carts and images of animals from flowers, 50) memory training, 51) composing verses for particular occasions or in praise of certain dignitaries, 52) composing poems in general, 53) lexicography, 54) filling up blanks in verse, 55) figures of speech, 56) ventriloquism, 57) the art of disguise, 58) gambling, 59) chess, 60) the art of dressing 61) ball games, 62) training of pets, 63) the art of war, and 64) physical culture.

In addition to a working knowledge of these sixty-four arts, the lover is recommended to acquire proficiency in the language of signs. In India free social intercourse between the sexes has been taboo from very early times, and lovers had often to exchange greetings and convey messages by means of gestures and signs when they happened to meet in public or in the houses of relatives and friends during some social function. The Hindus have evolved an elaborate language of gestures which is mainly used in their classical dances. Lovers do not, however, use this language as it is known to all educated Hindus. For the benefit of lovers there is a special secret code meaningless to others but all-important to the vigilant lover. A flower dropped by a lady, seemingly by accident, may be pregnant with meaning. If a red flower is dropped from the hair, it may mean one thing, while white quite a different thing. Touching the lobe of the ear as if to scratch may convey a definite message to the watching lover.

The classical language of signs falls under six headings:

(1) The sign of flowers and fruits: The use of flowers and fruits to denote certain ideas, places and time is covered by this heading. The usual method is to pluck particular flowers or fruits, to select them for eating or play with them in such a manner as to convey a message to the lover on a pre-arranged plan.

(2) The signs of the body: Touching, scratching or exposing certain parts of the body can convey messages to a lover who is looking for them. Touching the chest usually denotes deep-seated love; hair, passion. Each finger except the little one denotes a particular direction. The thumb stands for east, the index finger south, the middle finger west and the

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fourth finger north. Fifteen lines of the palm represent the fifteen days of the lunar month including the full moon or the new moon day. Thus if a man who meets his love in a temple or in a relative's house manages to show her his thumb and a particular palm line, the loving lady who is looking for a message comes to know the date and place of a possible appointment, the eastern direction suggested by the thumb denoting some place where they have already met. It only remains now to play with a flower or a fruit to fix the time of the appointment.

(3) The language of spices : Spices represent the pitch of one's passion. Aromatic substances stand for mild love, bitter spices for urgent desire. A girl who watches her lover eating is made to understand the nature and extent of his love by his preference for spices.

(4) The language of clothes : Touching or displaying coloured garments convey certain ideas. A red clothe, for instance, indicates a desire for immediate union, but a yellow garment separation or rejection of a suit.

(5) The language of the betel leaf : The offering of a betel with a slit in the middle denotes rejection or breaking off ; a betel leaf with an arrow cut in the middle indicates, on the other hand, burning love.

(6) The language of flower garlands : A garland in which red flowers predominate is indicative of an overwhelming yearning for immediate union ; brown denotes a passing fancy, yellow indifference and black disgust.

A person, after mastering the sixty-four auxiliary arts and sciences, and the language of signs is qualified for the more serious pursuit of love. The first thing such a person should try to know is the sexual type to which he or she belongs. Women are broadly classified into four types :

(1) Padmini or Lotus Woman : She is the most desirable type of woman. She has eyes beautiful as those of the fawn, with reddish corners. Her face is charming as the full moon, neck smooth and graceful, and bosom full and elevated. She has a well-shaped, delicate nose. Three exquisite folds encircle her navel. Her voice is sweet and musical. Her skin is soft as the petals of a sirisha blossom, and her complexion golden as the Champaka flower. Her gait is like the swan's. Her secretions have the perfume of the lotus.

Padmini's mental traits are as agreeable as her appearance. She is bashful, generous, loyal, religious, and dignified. Her favourite colour is white.

(2) Chitrini or Art Woman : Of medium stature but slim, Chitrini has black luxuriant hair and restless eyes. Her lips are full as the bimba fruits. Her conch shaped neck is round and graceful, waist slender, hips large, breasts plump and heavy, and body supple. Her voice is like the cooing of the peacock. While walking she has the majestic swing of an elephant. Her love secretions smell of honey.

Less spiritual than Padmini, Chitrini is the refined, cultured type with a taste for music, painting and literature. She is fond of beautiful clothes and ornaments, and is flattered by the attentions of admiring men. She delights in courtship and love play but dislikes violence in love. She has too refined a sense of aesthetics to be much enamoured of the actual sex act. Chitrini is sociable and amiable. A good conversationalist, she is liberal in her views and skilful in the mangement of domestic affairs.

(3) Samkhini or Conch Woman : She is not much to look at, being thin, tall or stout. Her blood is warm, and the blue veins are visible through the tawny skin. She has long legs and arms, a thick waist, small breasts, and a long tilted face to match. Her voice is harsh and gait precipitate. Her favourite colour is red.

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Though selfish she is capable of making a show of generosity. Cunning, she has polite manners and is ever on the look out for chances to enhance her own interests. Hard-hearted, malicious and vicious by nature, she is clever enough to hide her real nature and appear pleasant and obliging. When roused she is violent and delights to inflict nail marks on her lover. She eats and talks much.

(4) Hastini or Elephant Woman : She is the lowest sexual type and men of refined tastes and habits avoid her. She is short, fat and ugly. Her lips are thick, neck short or bent if long, and mouth broad. Her eyes are red and small. If of light complexion, Hastini appears rather anaemic and lustreless. She is slow of foot and walks ungainly on crooked feet and toes. She is shameless and cruel and has an insatiable capacity for love.

But Brahma is a thoughtful god and has created a mate for every woman. For there are four types of men to go with the four types of women. The classification of the male is mainly based on the length of the *membrum virile*. The smaller and thinner the member, the better the man. The four types of men are :

(1) Shasha or Hare man : This type is gracefully built though strong. Shasha has large eyes, a full, manly face with a prominent nose. His hair is silky. He is loyal, kindly disposed, god-fearing and virtuous. His actions are motivated by altruism. He is the correct mate for Padmini.

(2) Mirga or Buck Man : The Buck is something of a he-man. Tall, broad-shouldered and handsome, he has a commanding presonality. He is scrupulous, clean, brave and chivalrous. A warrior by nature, he respects the gods and elders. He is a patron of arts and letters, and is fond of music. He has a royal appetite. Proud and chivalrous, he is selfless, hospitable, generous, punblic-spirited and honest. The Buck is the man for Chitrini.

(3) Vrishabha or Bull Man : The Bull is a rough and ready type with a quick temper and an overbearing disposition. His limbs are sinewy, forehead high, and eyes red and large. He loves music but of the vulgar sort. He has little inclination for the delights of the soul or even of the intellect, but is fond of the pleasures of the flesh. Not particularly loyal, he delights in the company of several women and is quite capable of satisfying the desires of all. He is the male counterpart of Samkhini.

(4) Asva or Stallion Man : This is an ugly type of man with long limbs, coarse hair, uneven teeth and a broad, scaly chest. He is rough but of strong build. He has a large, wide mouth and neck and ears that do not seem to fit in with the general lay out of the head. His legs are bent and he walks clumsily. He stares at people and is incapable of mild speech. Blessed with a phallus nine inches long, he has only comtempt for the frail Padmini, but loves to mate with large women of the Hastini type.

These four types, more or less, correspond to the four castes of the Hindus. The Hare corresponds to the Brahmin, the Buck to the Kshatriya, the Bull to the Vaishya and the Stallion to the degraded Sudra.

Having found out which type he belongs to, the studious man of pleasure will do well to learn the nature of the shifting erogenous zones in women. Klyanmalla describes in detail a mysterious connection between the varying digits of the moon and the changing erogenous zones in women. In other words, each day of the lunar month is supposed to have a definite bearing on the exact position of the erogenous zone in a woman.

Speaking generally, from the full moon day the Chandrakala (as the erogenous zone is termed) descends by the left side of the woman from the forehead through the eyes, cheeks, lips, chin, neck, shoulder, arm-pit, breast, the side, hip, pubic region, genitals, knee,

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ankle and the foot ; on the new moon day it starts its upward course by the right side in a like manner and reaches the forehead on the full moon day.

The amount of amorous urge centred round a Chandrakala is not, however, equal for all women on a particular day. Padmini is the most excitable on the first five days (excepting the third) of the lunar fortnight (both bright and dark), Chitrini on four even dates commencing from the sixth, Samkhini on the third, seventh, eleventh and thirteenth, and Hastini on the remaining two days of the fortnight and on the full moon and new moon days. It is not, however, enough to catch the shifting zone at the correct spot on the correct day, but it must be caught at the correct time. For love-making is an exact science and the persevering voluptuary should bear in mind the time of sexual congress and the type of woman he consorts with before he hopes to derive full pleasure out of the act. Padmini, we are told, is most amenable to the pleasures of sex from 3 a.m. till sunset, and Hastini from midday till sunrise. Chitrini and Samkhini have brief spells of excitability ; the former may be tackled between 6 and 9 p.m. and the latter from 12 to 3 p.m.

It is difficult to check up the truth of these pedantic assertions. More interesting and helpful, however, are hints on courtship. In India marriages are usually arrranged by parents, but there have always been, even in the strictest sect, lovers who have courted and married mates of their own choice. Moreover, certain men, because of the peculiarity of their position, cannot have matches arranged for them ; a man of good family, for instance, at times finds himself without a friend to arrange a match for him if he is without money, and has to depend upon his own wits to win a bride. Wealthy men of quarrelsome nature, the newly rich of low birth wishing to marry above their social position, and independent men who do not wish to be dictated by relatives, are likely to court and marry women of their choice. For the benefit of such people Vatsyayana gives some useful hints on courtship.

A young man who is not likely to be suspected of having designs, may manage to engage himself in play with a girl whom he happens to love. He is advised to be pleasant not only to the girl but also to her companions and nurse, as a girl naturally places much faith in them and is often swayed by their opinions. The good opinion of nurses and companions if well exploited may, Vatsyayana tells us, lead to their becoming willing accomplices in arranging secret meetings. The nurse of a girl, if she takes a liking for a young man, may even act against the wishes of the girl's parents and bring about the marriage of the lovers without the parents knowing anything about it.

Places and occasions wherein young men and women can mix together without raising suspicion of elders are very rare in India, and most men who wish to approach young ladies with a view to marriage or fornication have to requisition the services of a go-between, at least in the initial stages of courtship. A very desirable go-between, in the opinion of Vatsyayana, is the young daughter of the girl's nurse. The lover must win over this girl who is naturally a friend of his love, and must tutor her to recite his qualifications for the hand of her friend. The nurse herself, if bought over with gold, will serve as an excellent go-between. If neither of these two persons can be won over, efforts must be made to procure the services of :—

(1) A common friend or relative, perferably an elderly woman ;
(2) An elderly widow ;
(3) The washerwoman or barber who may be common to both the families ;
(4) A hawker of perfumes ;
(5) A mendicant ;
(6) The milkman or milkmaid who visits both the houses ;
(7) A florist or gardener ;

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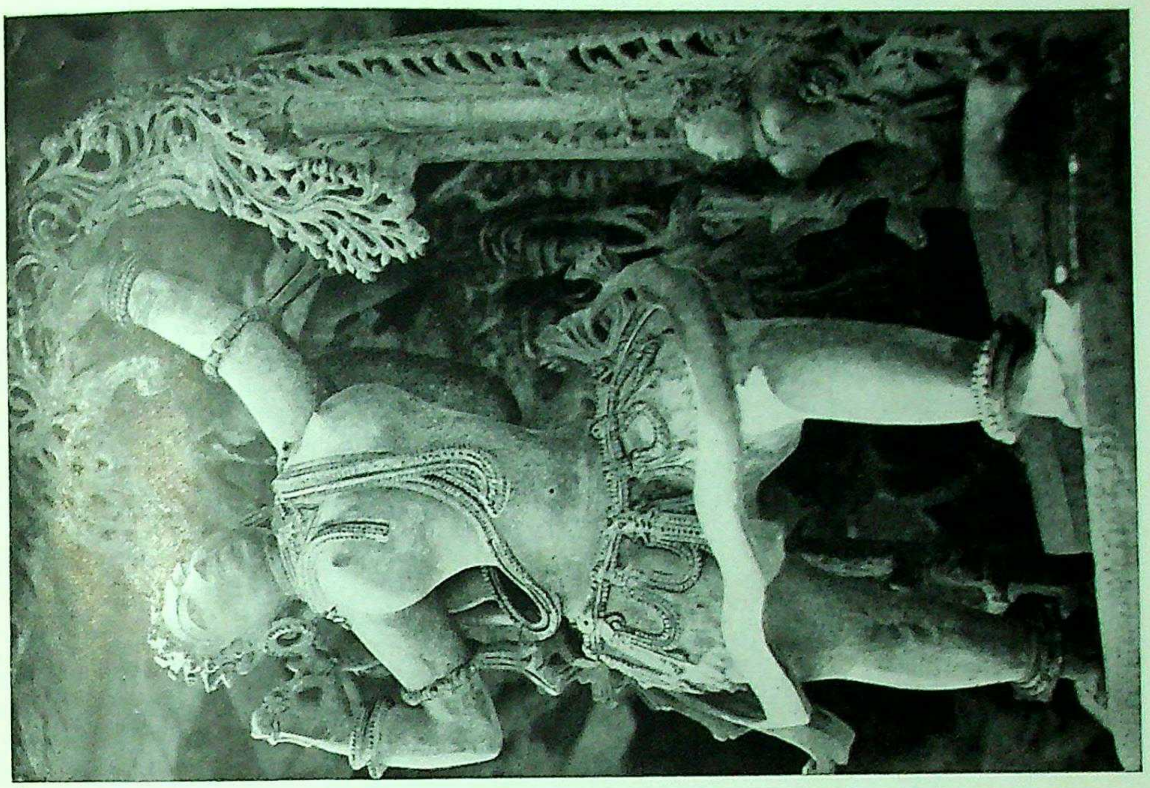
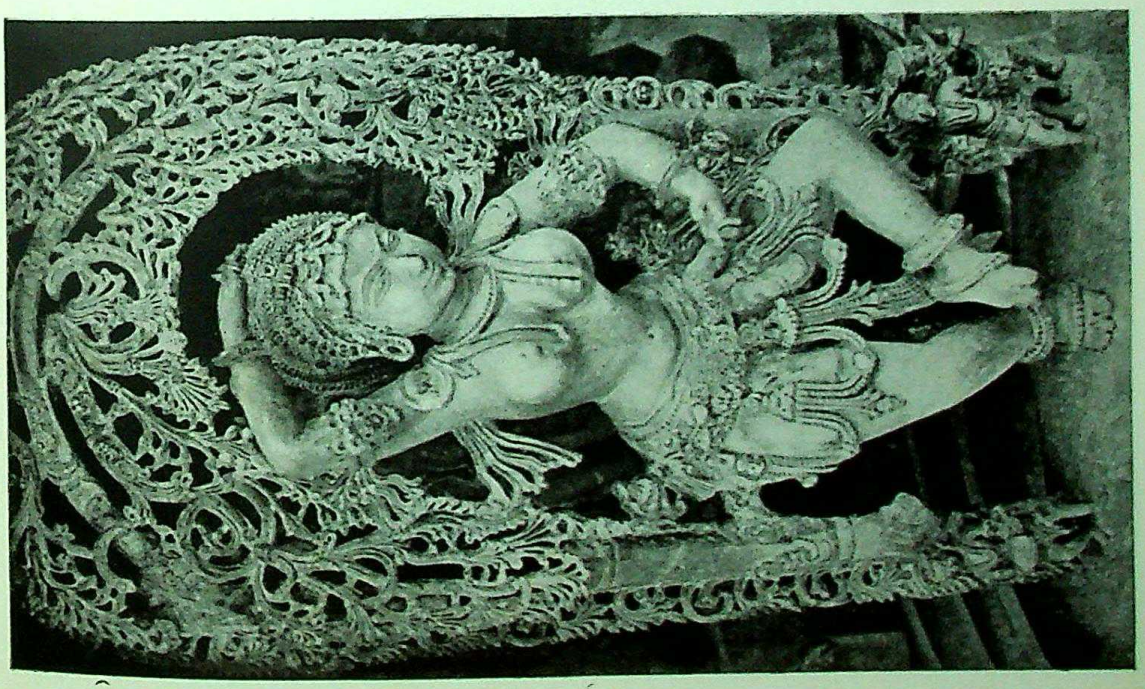


133 A DANCE POSE OF THE AGGRESSIVE TYPE

Belur Temple, Mysore State : 12th Century A. D.

Photos : A. K. Banerji



132 AN EXQUISITE DANCE POSE

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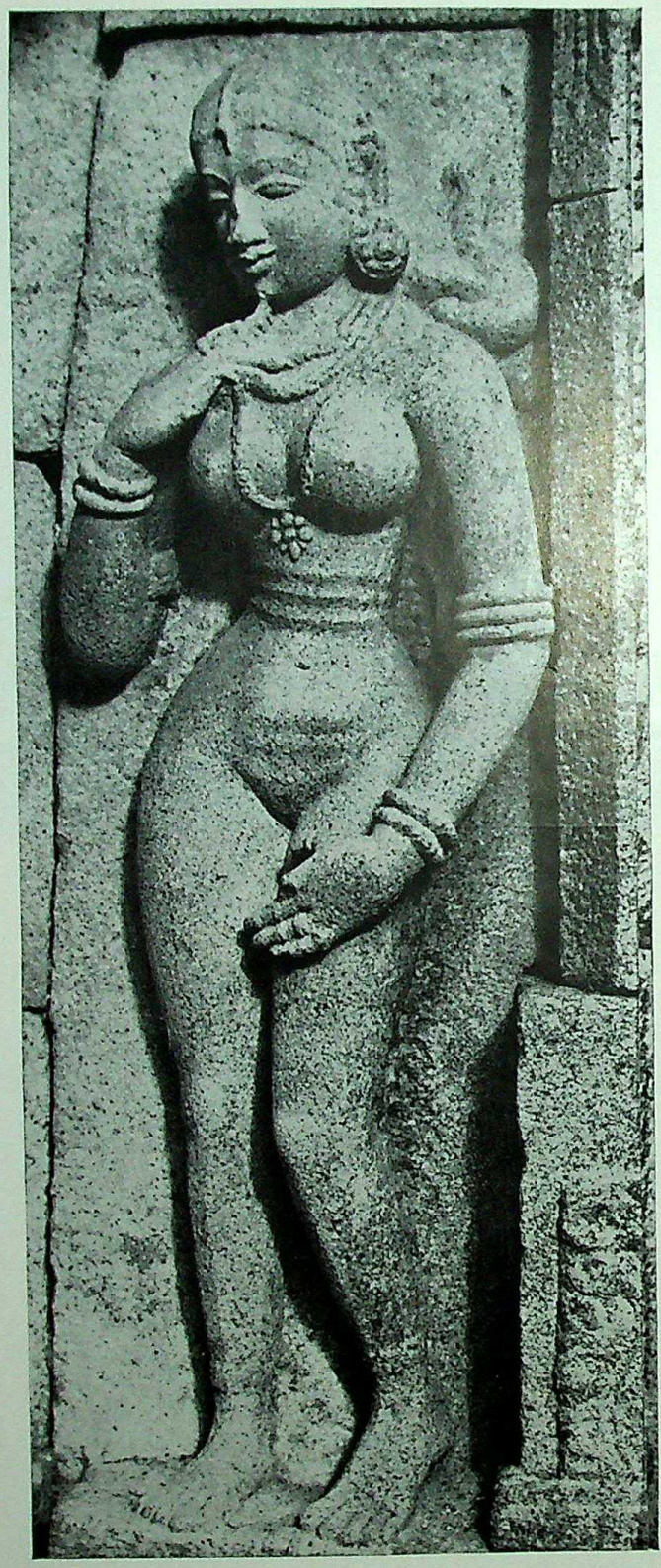

134 THE BASHFUL BRIDE
Venu Gopal Temple, Srirangam, S. India : 16th. Century A. D.
Photo : K. Arunachalam

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THE FOUR TYPES OF WOMAN

135 CHITRINI OR ART WOMAN
Second best

136 PADMINI OR LOTUS WOMAN
The most desirable type

137 HASTINI OR ELEPHANT WOMAN
The undesirable type

138 SHANKHINI OR CONCH WOMAN
The common type

Drawn after finds at Begram : 2nd Century A. D.

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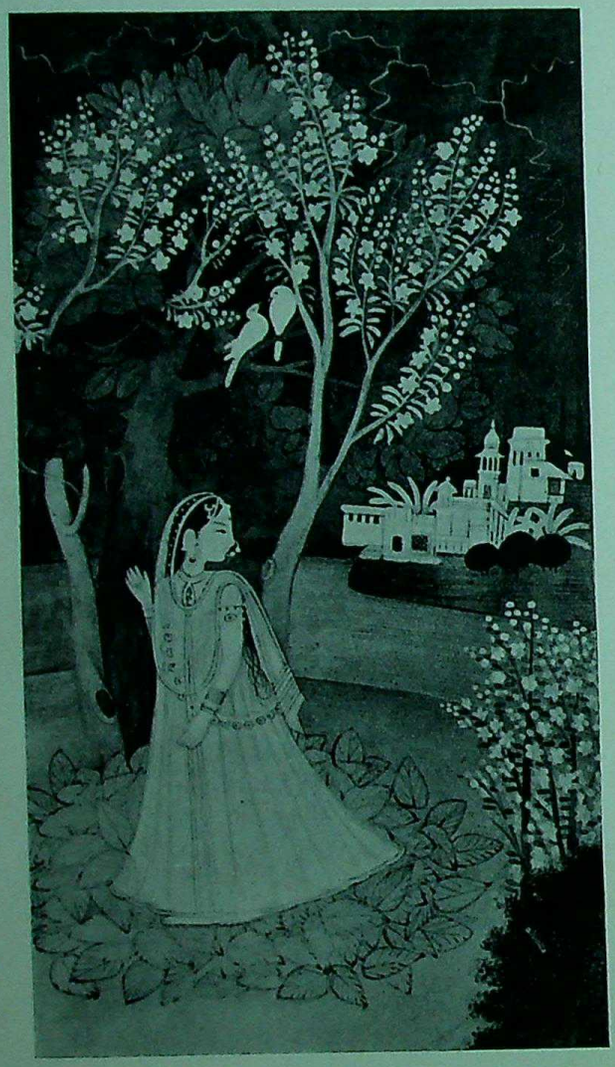
NAYIKAS



139 UTKA

She who waits alone for her lover in a lonely place

140 SWADHINA PATIKA

She who has her husband under absolute control. The happiest of Nayikas, her husband is her slave

Pahari painting : 17-18th Century : *Coomaraswamy's Collection*

Nayikas are heroines or types variously classified by Indian writers : In relation to her husband or lover, in relation to age, by inherent qualities or according to moods arising from peculiar circumstances. Bharata, the legendary author of *Bharata Natya* classifies Nayikas into fourteen while Kesava Dasa, author of *Rasika Priya* (16th Century) classifies them into eight. Painters of the Pahari (Highland) Schooi (so called because the School flourished in the hilly region from Jammu in Kashmir to Nepal with Kangra Valley as the centre) have idealized these Nayikas in their paintings. Their pet model was Radha, the many sided lady love of Krishna, the arch-lover of the Hindu Pantheon

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(8) A dancing girl ;
(9) A palmist or fortune teller ;
(10) A professional jester ;
(11) A reliable menial ;
(12) The family tailor ;
(13) Any clever woman ;
(14) A cowherd ;
(15) A bawd.

For the successful termination of courtship, it is necessary to please the intermediary by every means. Those who are not above accepting bribes must be paid in cash ; relatives and friends who cannot be thus bought must be kept in good humour by the giving of desirable presents. It is even said that if a woman-intermediary, taken by the good looks of the man she works for, requests for the satisfaction of her sexual desires as a payment, her request must be granted without demur.

After establishing contact with the girl he courts, the lover must improve their good relations by sending her presents and seeing her as often as possible. With the latter object in view he must visit places frequented by her. On such occasions he must dress himself in elegant clothes and give her a very favourable impression of his personality and qualifications as a lover. He would be, in all probability, meeting her on these occasions in company of other ladies or her male relatives, and hence should watch for signs that may give indications of her interest in him. Some of the signs which betray dawning love in a maiden are :

(1) An inability to look straight at the lover ;
(2) Blushing ;
(3) Laughing when the lover speaks even if his conversation is not particularly comic ;
(4) A tendency to linger near the lover longer than necessary ;
(5) Kissing or embracing a child when the lover is near by ;
(6) Talking loudly to companions on irrelevant subjects or teasing them within sight of the lover ;
(7) Casting side glances at the departing lover ;
(8) Adjusting robes in a manner to expose parts of the body or limbs.

After the lover has by these signs discoverd dawning love in a maiden, he may arrange for a secret meeting. The time and place of the meeting should be so chosen as to give the least suspicion to her guardians. A convenient time is said to be when the guardians have gone away to visit friends or the shrine of the village gods, leaving the girl with the nurse or some elderly woman servant who has already been won over by the lover. On meeting the girl, the lover is exhorted to engage her in pleasant conversation and regale her with love stories from the epics and the classics. Tickling, kissing and even embracing are permitted on these occasions, but further liberties are prohibited before marriage. So much for pre-marital courtship.

Hindu writers emphasize the need for courting, coaxing and generally working up a newly married girl before she is initiated into the deeper mysteries of love. The rape of brides is absolutely forbidden. Elaborate instructions are given on how to take the young wife into the husband's confidence. If the girl has been courted before marriage, the problem is comparatively easy since a certain amount of confidence has already been established before the momentous meeting in the nuptial chamber. But the working up of a girl wedded in an arranged match is a complicated affair. The husband is probably meeting her for the

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first time in private, and the memories of the nuptial night having a strong influence on their subsequent relations, a husband who is not acquainted with the ways of young girls may antagonize his wife for life by his clumsy or impatient behaviour. Hence a newly married man must take infinite pains to ingratiate himself into the favours of his bride and work her up in such a way as to disarm all resistance and make her yield herself to him with pleasure and delight.

To begin at the very beginning, on the bride being conducted to the nuptial chamber, the husband who has been waiting for her will do well to welcome her by a pleasant smile, This good work may be followed by agreeable conversation. A young bride, Vatsyayana tells us, is extremely shy and guards the centre of her charms most jealously and is even suspicious of conversation. The clever husband noticing the bride's reticence will lure her into conversation by enquiring solicitously about the welfare of her parents and relatives. If she is responsive, as she is bound to be, he will invite her to sit down and gently lead her by the hand to the couch or the bed and sit by her side. He may now tell her clever stories about lovers and their ways, putting in appropriate places comments on the art of love forbidden in respectable society. It will be very helpful if he can coax her to play a game of chess or dice which will give him plenty of opportunities for teasing, tickling and pinching her and generally dragging her into the net he is cunningly weaving. If she plays, the lover must see that she wins the game. If she does not know how to play chess or dice, he can undertake to teach her and make her an expert on the spot.

After having played with her sufficiently long, the husband may make himself bold to take the liberty of embracing her. It is desirable that at this stage light be put out and further proceedings conducted in the dark. For maidens, like cats, are bolder in the dark.

After the embrace comes the kiss. Experienced sages tell us that a maiden who may submit herself to an embrace may revolt at a kiss. Once the bride is won over to the kiss, they assure us, further progress is bound to be satisfactory. The one infallible method of winning over the shy bride to the first kiss may seem strange to Westerners unacquainted with Eastern art of love. The lover is instructed to hold a spiced betel leaf between his lips and offer it to the girl with a request to receive it directly into her mouth. When the enamoured bride takes the bait with a wide open mouth, things become pretty easy for the lover. If, however, the girl does not respond to this strategem and shows reluctance or hesitation, the husband must supplicate her by passionate words praising her beauty and confessing to a mad, hopeless love. In some cases this may not work and then the husband may threaten to commit suicide and leave the young bride a widow. If the bride is inclined to view this prospect with equanimity, he should fall at her feet and beg for her favours. This master stroke is bound to succeed, for no woman, say the sages, has ever been known to kick a sincere lover who has fallen at her feet.

Once the bride has thus been won over, she may be with ease taken to bed. By proper mangement of her person she can then be worked up, step by step, to that physical and mental condition in which she will seek with delight the satisfaction of her aroused desires.

The sages warn us that a man should not indulge in secret pleasure with a woman in presence of fire, near a pious or respectable individual, in a temple or other holy place, in the cremation ground, on the king's highway or in a friend's house without his knowledge. Sacred days and inauspicious times should also be avoided. The last day of the month and the new moon are inauspicious. At sunrise and sunset congress with women should be avoided. During a religious fast or vow of abstinence, during illness and after strenuous labour it is not desirable to make love.

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Chapter Eleven

LOVE AS A FINE ART (*Concluded*)

There are six auxiliary pleasures which give completeness to union. These are

(1) Alinganam or Embrace ;
(2) Chumbanam or kiss ;
(3) Nakhakshata or scratching ;
(4) Dantakarma or biting ;
(5) Sitkrata or making inarticulate sounds ;
(6) Panighata or stroking with the hand ;

Vatsyayana and following him Kalyanmalla classify embrace into twelve :

(1) Spripaca or mild contact : This is indulged in public without exciting suspicion. In a crowd or a social gathering a man just passes his love brushing his body against hers. The loved one feels the pleasure of the contact but others do not notice it.

(2) Viddhaka or breast pressure embrace : This, like the first, is a secret physical contact but here it is the woman who takes the initiative. She passes her lover either in front of or behind him brushing her bosom against him unnoticed by others.

(3) Udgrishtaka or rubbing : This type of embrace is recommended in a crowd in the dark when the lovers may rub their bodies against each other for a considerably long time and frequently, the darkness preventing detection.

(4) Piditika or pressure embrace : This is an advance on No. 3. In the darkness one of the lovers manages to stand against a wall or a pillar and the other is enabled to apply greater pressure.

(5) Lataveshtitaka or the creeper embrace : In this form, always indulged in private, the woman twines her arms round her lover as a creeper entwining a tree and looks lovingly into his face which he bends down to kiss her. The woman takes the lead and she inflames the lover's passion.

(6) Vrikshadhirudhaka or tree climbing embrace : The woman standing on one leg on the right foot of the man raises her right leg and twines it round his thighs and raises herself for a kiss, like a man climbing a tree. Her one arm, in the act of 'tree climbing' holds the lover by the shoulder and with the other, pressed at his waist, she heaves herself upward. This difficult embrace is resorted to by women who wish to work up dull lovers.

(7) Teelatandulaka or rice-sesamum embrace : Balls of unboiled rice coated or patted with sesamum seeds form offering to manes in Hindu funeral rites, and the lover's intimate physical contact in this type of embrace suggested the name.

(8) Kshiraniraka or milk and water embrace : A complete fusion of man and woman, as water mixed with milk, is attempted in this form of violent embrace. The lovers sitting or lying down clasp each other, under the urge of passion as if to unite themselves into one. This violent embrace usually precedes coitus.

(9) Urupaguhana or the pincer embrace : The lovers, lying on their sides, face to face, embrace each other, the thighs of one locking those of the other.

(10) Jaghanupaghuhana or hip-thigh embrace : The man lying on his back, his partner clasps him violently, the middle regions being in close contact.

(11) Sthanalingana or bosom embrace : In this, the woman clasps the man in such a manner as to apply the maximum amount of pressure by her breasts, the lovers either sitting or lying down on the side face to face.

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(12) Lalatika or forhead embrace : This is a mild form of embrace in which the eyes, nose and lips of the lovers meet in close contact, the foreheads touching.

Kisses like embraces are of several kinds of which a few may be mentioned :

(1) Nimitika or restrained kiss : This is the kiss of the bashful maiden almost forced out of her lips. It is a gentle and quick kiss, the coyness or nervousness of the girl not permitting of a prolonged or passionate one.

(2) Supritika or trembling kiss : The man, bent upon impressing a passionate kiss takes the nether lips of the maiden between his lips and tries to hold it against her will, the girl out of shyness or fear making repeated efforts to withdraw her trembling lips from the vicious lock.

(3) Ghattitika or the probing kiss : In this case, the shy girl is, after much coaxing, made to take the lead. She covers the eyes of her lover with her palm, closes her own eyes, takes the nether lip of the lover between both her lips and caresses it with her probing tongue.

(4) Sama or straight kiss : This is an honest kiss administered by the man straight on the lips of his beloved.

(5) Vakra or round-about kiss : In this form, the face of the lover is turned sideways and the lips are pressed in the shape of a circle or an egg.

(6) Udbhranta or revolving kiss : The man impresses a kiss on the lips of the woman by drawing her face towards his.

(7) Avapitika or pressure kiss : This is an improvement on No. 6, with greater pressure applied.

(8) Akrishta or high pressure kiss : The lower lip of one of the partners is held by the other between the thumb and the forefinger and is pressed to the lips in an exquisite fashion.

(9) Samputaka or cupping kiss : Both the lips of one of the lovers are caught by those of the other and retained in a kiss as long as he or she wishes.

(10) Jihvajudha or tongue-tilting kiss : In this form while the lovers imprint a passionate kiss, the tongues too kiss and caress each other.

Vatsyayana describes several other forms of kisses and observes that the main object of the kiss is to heighten the pleasure of love. The places where a kiss may awaken desire are also mentioned. Apart from the lips, the normal receptacles of kisses, the forehead, the cheeks, the eyes, chin and bosom are also mentioned as desirable places for kissing. The kissing of a woman's hand is permissible, but not her toes. A woman may, however, kiss the toes, feet, legs and thighs of the man she loves. Vatsyayana asks every lover to master the art of kissing thoroughly, and recommends a kissing combat by lovers as a pleasant form of diversion that heightens the delights of love.

So much for the kiss. Before going into the details of scratching and biting, it is necessary to mention that in India love making has always been recognized as a peculiar form of pleasure in which a certain amount of pain, physical and mental, is conducive to enhancement. The surrender of a woman to order is repugnant to all except probably the moralist who views love as an unpleasant duty imposed on man by the need for progeny. Writers on erotics necessarily give greater importance to the play aspect of love and maintain that teasing, inflicting minor injuries and even real quarrels followed by reconciliation give added zest to the pleasures of sex. Petty pain is always an aid to love. Inflicting

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exquisite wounds on a woman by nails or teeth by a lover has been studied as an art in India, and great lovers grow long nails and trim them with care so as to scratch their beloveds in love's warfare.

The standard nail-marks are eight :

(1) Achchuritaka or the mild scratch : The nails of all the five fingers are mildly applied on a sensitive part, preferably on the breasts of a woman, with sufficient pressure to cause slight pain but not to leave a mark. All women including shy and bashful maidens not experienced in the game of love are said to love it.

(2) Ardhachandrika or the crescent : The nails are applied with sufficient pressure to cause a crescent shaped mark on the region below the navel, about the sacral dimples or hip joint.

(3) Mandala or circle : Two crescents make a circle.

(4) Rekha or the line scratch : In this variety, the nail marks form a vertical line. The head, the thighs and the chest are the appropriate places for the Rekha. Nails of the middle finger, the index and the third fingers should be used.

(5) Vyaghranakha or the tiger's claw : These are straight marks converging towards the navel, deep and long like a tiger's claw.

(6) Mayurapada or peacock's foot : This is a nail mark made round the loving one's nipples and is in shape like a peacock's foot.

(7) Shashaplutaka or leaping rabbit : This is an advance on No. 6 and is suggestive, in its vigorous application, of the leaping of a rabbit.

(8) Utpalapatraka or the lotus leaf : This nail mark, in shape like the lotus leaf is made on the breasts or waist of a woman.

Vatsyayana mentions a supplementary scratch called Smaraniyaka (the token of remembrance) to be used by a lover prior to his going on a long journey. It is formed of two lines like an angle if the separation is of short duration, of three lines like a triangle for longer periods, and of four lines like a rectangle or parallellogram if parting for good.

Biting like scratching, falls into 8 main divisions :

(1) Gudhaka or secret bite : This is a mild bite leaving a reddish mark scarcely visible to the naked eye, and is made with one of the more prominent of the front teeth,

(2) Uchchunaka or canine bite : When the teeth are applied with sufficient pressure to cause a swelling, the bite is called canine.

(3) Pravalamani or the coral bite : When any part of the body is bitten with sufficient violence to cause a red contusion on the skin, it is called a coral bite.

(4) Manimala or chain of corals : A number of coral bites forming a lengthy chain make a Manimala.

(5) Bindu or the dot : This is a quick vigorous bite leaving a pin prick mark not bigger than a dot on the skin.

(6) Bindumala or dot chain : A series of Bindus make a Bindumala.

(7) Khandabhraka or the broken cloud : This is an oblique mark, the result of biting with uneven teeth on the breasts of a woman.

(8) Varahacharvitaka or the boar's bite : A vigorous chewing of the shoulder down to the breasts causing a long unbroken chain of scarlet veals is known by this name. This is indulged in only by men who are excessively passionate ; the women who appreciate it are also of a like temperament.

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While these are the standard types of scratching and biting, Vatsyayana says that it is difficult to strictly adhere to these types always, and a man, under the urge of passion, is likely to indulge in scratching or biting that has no name.

Stroking also enhances pleasure. Stroking is of four kinds :

(1) Apahastaka or the back palm strike : This is, as the name indicates, administered by the back of the palm, on the hollow between the breasts of a woman.

(2) Kilataka or the close fist stroke : While the lovers are in a close embrace, the man strikes the woman on the back with his closed fists. The woman is recommended to hit back, adding abusive language.

(3) Prasritaka or the hollow palm stroke : This stroke is administered on the head of the woman with the hollow of the lovers' palm. It is an alternative or corrective to No. 1 when the woman is not quite pleased with the Apahstaka and expresses her protest by word of mouth or, if she is too excited for words, by gestures.

(4) Samatalaka or the flat palm stroke : This is a blow with an open palm in the chest or buttocks of the man if the woman finds that he is not playing the game.

Vatsyayana observes that people of different provinces have different ways of stroking. The men of the Deccan are said to be specialists in this form of love play, their strokes causing broad marks of contusion on the skin. The stroking peculiar to the Deccan has a classification of its own.

With stroking goes Shitkrida or erotic articulations. These are, in fact, inarticulate sounds made during the excitement of sexual congress, and may be either involuntary groans expressive of one's complete abandonment to the violence of passion or voluntary cooing designed to stimulate desire. Shitkrida has been studied in detail and classified. A long list has been drawn out of which a few items are given below :

(1) The nasal sound 'Hind'.
(2) The rumbling sound 'Hrong'.
(3) The moan.
(4) Cooing.
(5) Hissing.
(6) Clucking.

In additon to these classified noises, intelligent phrases such as 'I am dying', 'spare me', 'kill me', 'for pity's sake stop', etc. are also recommended during sexual congress.

The Hindus often speak of love's warfare, and the soldiers wounded in the battle-field exhibit their wounds with pride. The nail marks, teeth and other minor wounds caused in the battle of love form a perennial theme for teasing, joking and sham quarrels among lovers and friends. For obivous reasons, any form of violence which leaves marks on the skin are avoided in clandestine love.

From the auxiliary or preliminary pleasures hitherto mentioned, we now come to the 'real thing'. The same wealth of details that characterises the precepts regarding the preliminary and auxiliary pleasure is available in the matter of coitus too. Coital postures fall into three main divisions :

(1) The normal attitude in which the man plays the leading role ;
(2) The reversed attitude in which the woman takes the lead ;
(3) Fellatia.

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Basing his arguments on these three fundamentals in relation to the type of partners, Vatsyayana describes some eighty-four coital postures. Yasodhra, his commentator, maintains that there are exactly 729 possible coital postures from which the lovers can select those they consider best for themselves. Some of the postures have a really scientfic basic while the others are the offspring of a fertile imagination.

I do not wish to describe even a few of these postures in detail but would like to invite the reader's attention to Vatsyayana's shrewd remark that a study of all the postures may prove of no avail to a man who, in the grip of the anarchic passion, may invent his own postures which may defeat the imagination of the most erudite scholar on erotics. He also observes that married unhappiness is often due to unequal sexual combinations. Of such combinations, the following are a few :

(1) Union between a sexually weak male and a moderately virile female ;
(2) Between a weak man and a strong woman ;
(3) Between a moderately virile man and a weak woman ;
(4) Between a moderately virile man and a strong woman ;
(5) Between a virile man and a weak woman ;
(6) Between a virile man and a moderately virile woman.

In other words the strong must mate with the strong and the weak, weak. Similarly a middling must look for the same type.

Vatsyayana in a true scientific spirit describes certain perverted practices but forbids men and women the indulgence thereof. He is, however, careful to add that one should not be unduly harsh in judging others, as there is no universally accepted standard in sexual morality which is mainly conditioned by local customs and usages.

In perverted practices eunuchs and courtesans in Vatsyayana's time played the leading role. A king or noble with many wives and mistresses indulged in a sort of communal sexual congress while the women in a harem who, for obvious reasons, could not have complete satisfaction of their sexual urges from their husband were not considered particularly sinful if they smuggled men into the harem or indulged in perverted practices among themselves or with the eunuchs guarding the palace. The women of Strirajya (women's country), Vatsyayana says, married many young men, and the queen and the matriarchs diverted themselves in the company of a multitude of young husbands. The impotent had recourse to charms and medicines for rejuvenation. Those who could not regain their lost vitality through medicines, magic and prayers used artificial methods for pleasing their partners. It can be seen from the *Kama Sutra* that a profitable trade in artificial phalli was secretly carried on in Vatsyayana's time. These phalli were made of gold, silver, brass, lead or wood according to the status of the possessor. Royalty went in for solid gold and the poor for base metals or wood.

The general belief that sexual virility in males is proportionate to the size of the *membrum virile* was current in Vatsyayana's time too, and the seer of love describes several methods for increasing the length and thickness of the male member. He mentions a method, much favoured of the people of his time who used to increase the thickness of their phalli by rubbing on them certain hairy insects which caused a permanent swelling of the skin. Some men also bored holes at the base of the phalli for wearing metallic devices intended to enhance pleasure.

Hindu writers on erotics have made an exhaustive study of the psychology of women and have found that men who are generally successful with women are :

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(1) A master of *Kama Sutra ;*
(2) A clever story teller ;
(3) A handsome youth ;
(4) A childhood companion or playmate separated through social restraint or any other cause ;
(5) A wealthy man under whom a close relative of the woman he courts works ;
(6) A man of free and easy manners ;
(7) A man who can keep a woman's secrets ;
(8) One who is obliging and willing to perform small, pleasant jobs for women ;
(9) A man known to be a successful go-between for lovers ;
(10) A secret friend or paramour of a well-known lady's companion ;
(11) A man well thought of by ladies of fashion ;
(12) A libidinous but popular neighbour ;
(13) A bridegroom new to the family and surroundings ;
(14) An attendant on a lady who is passsionately fond of her ;
(15) A lover of theatrical performances ;
(16) A good dancer or actor ;
(17) A famous musician ;
(18) A comedian ;
(19) A magician ;
(20) A man known to be liberal with his money ;
(21) A strong man with an established reputation for virility.
(22) A man of exceptional courage and daring ;
(23) A lover of picnics and garden parties ;
(24) A superior of a lady's husband in intellect, beauty or wealth ;
(25) A man of taste and culture who dresses fashionably and lives in a luxurious style ;
(26) A lucky man.

Women who fall an easy prey to men are :

(1) One who is fond of standing on balconies or in front of doors for sightseeing in general and watching men in particular ;
(2) A society lady showing eagerness to mix freely with young men ;
(3) An officious woman ;
(4) One who watches strangers slyly through the corners of her eyes ;
(5) One who often looks round :
(6) A neglected wife ;
(7) A superseded wife even if not neglected ;
(8) A wife who hates her husband for any reason whatsoever ;
(9) An accomplished woman with a taste for fine arts ;
(10) A barren woman ;
(11) A woman whose childern die frequently ;
(12) A woman who breaks the laws of her society ;

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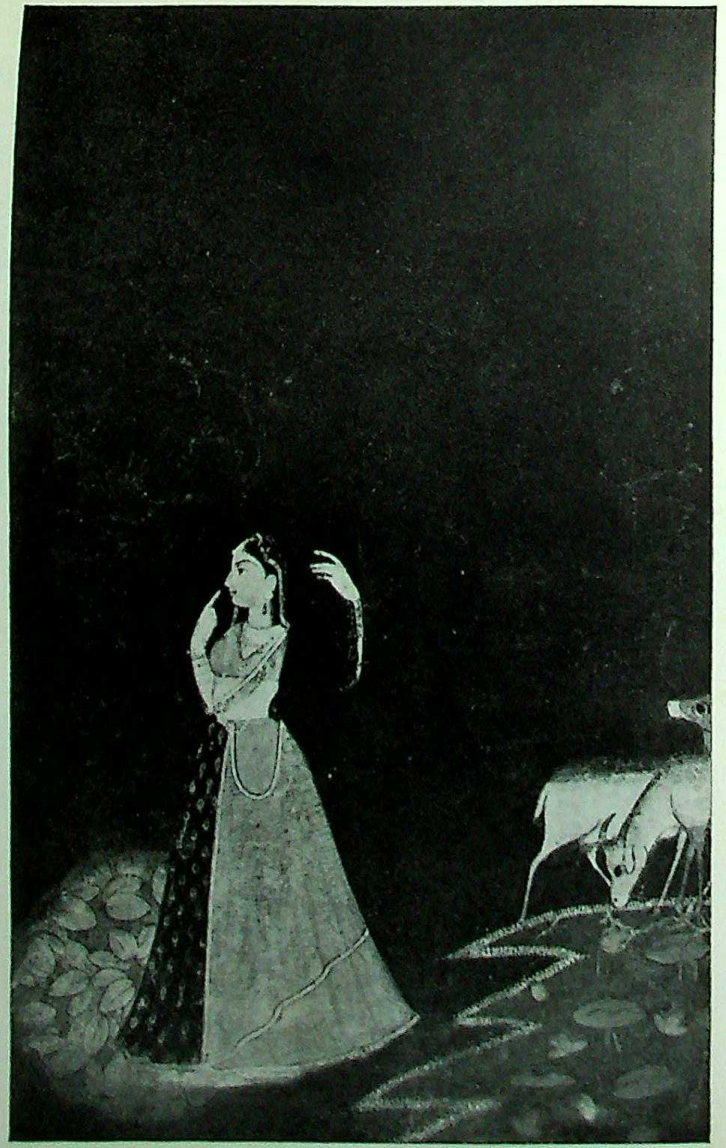

141 UTKA
Waiting restlessly for her lover in a lonely spot in a dark night. Her left arm is round the trunk of the tree under which she waits.

142 VIPRA LABDHA OR ONE WHO IS DISAPPOINTED
She has waited all night for her lover in vain and the approach of morn makes her desperate. She tears the jewels from her arms.

Pahari, 17-18th Century: *Coomaraswamy's Collection.*

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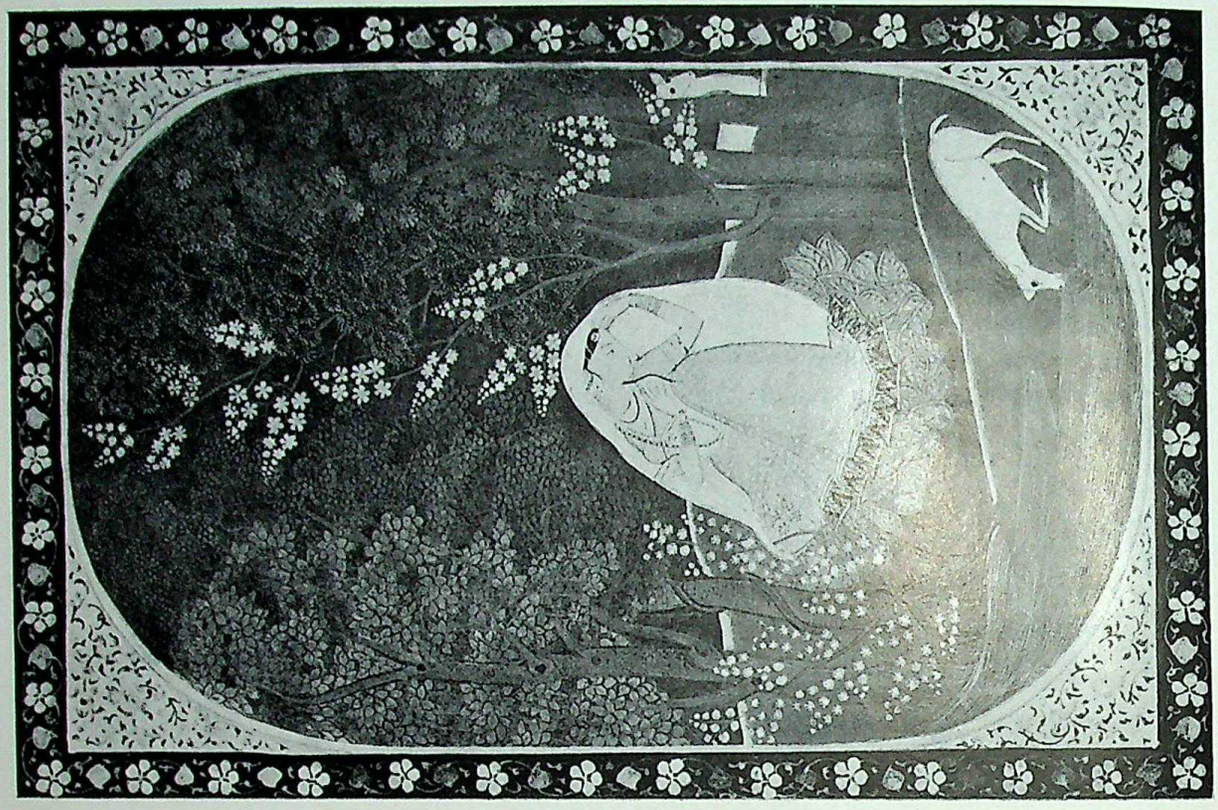
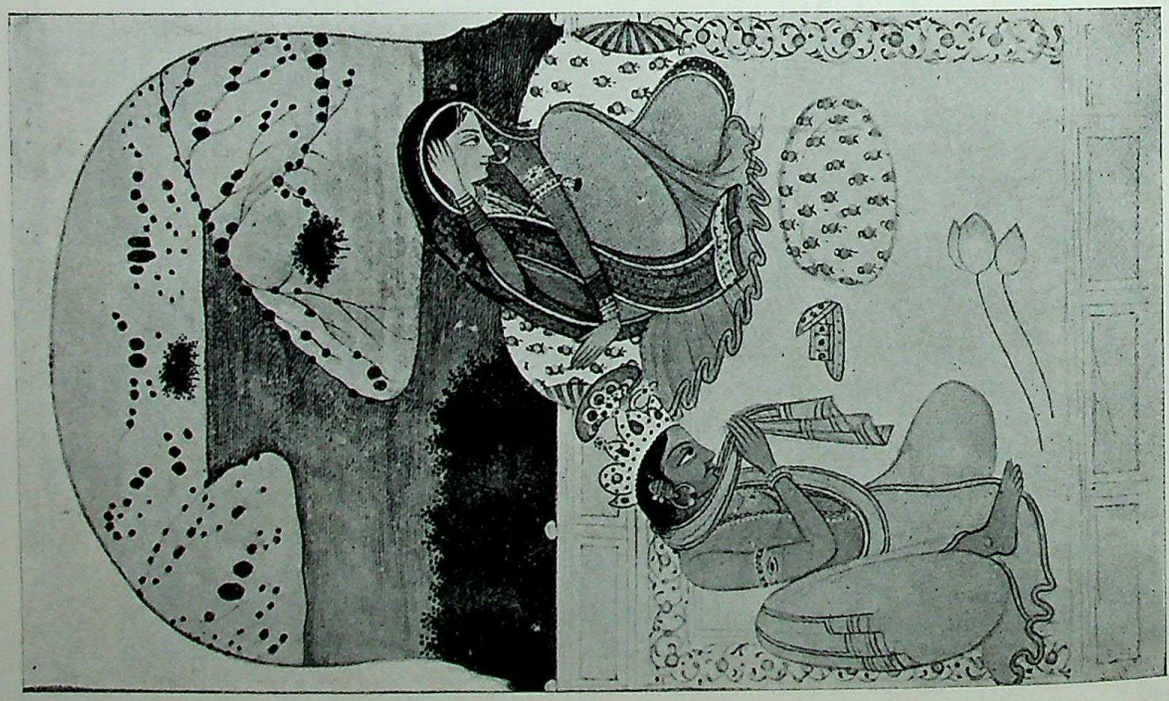


144 UTKA WAITS IN A LONELY PLACE
The wild deer indicates a place free from disturbance from man



143 MANINI
She who repulses the prayers of her lover

Pahari, 17-18th Century : *Coomaraswamy's Collection*

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Pahari, 17-18th Century: *Coomaraswamy's Collection*

NAYIKAS

145 ABHI SANDHITA

One who has quarrelled with her lover. The miserable lover is departing and she is more miserable

146 KHANDITA

One who is offended. The love-lorn Nayika has waited in vain all night for the lover and in the morning he appears when he is hardly needed

Pahari, 19th Century: Lahore Museum

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NAYIKAS

147 A NABODHA OR MAIDEN
A Nayika frightened to meet her lover alone
From a Pahari painting: 18th Century

148 CHAND ABHISARIKA
The Abhisarika who goes forth by the moonlight to meet her lover
From a Pahari painting: 17-18th Century

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(13) A poor woman fascinated by the way of life of the rich ;
(14) A wife separated from her husband and living in her father's house ;
(15) The wife of an actor or dancer ;
(16) A vain, bragging woman ;
(17) A woman loving finery married to a miser ;
(18) A young widow ;
(19) A woman whose husband has several unmarried brothers living with him ;
(20) A pretentious woman anxious to be known as a friend of men of letters and culture ;
(21) Wife of an impotent man ;
(22) A woman married against her will ;
(23) The big made wife of a small man ;
(24) A vivacious young lady married to a pot-bellied man ;
(25) Wife of an ugly, deformed or slovenly man ;
(26) An insulted wife seeking revenge ;
(27) A woman whose husband has business abroad and frequently lives away from her ;
(28) Wife of a jealous man ;
(29) A restless woman ;
(30) Wife of a man whose body stinks ;
(31) The young wife of an old man ;
(32) A village girl newly come to the city and fascinated by the marvels of the city ;
(33) A drunken woman ;
(34) A woman who dresses herself in a tight-fitting jacket so as to display the shapeliness of her breasts.

Further, women have their varying moods or states of mind. Numerous factors give rise to these varying moods in women, disappointment, age, frustration, expectation, anxiety, coyness, and natural reserve being a few of them. Most of the writers on erotics have taken notice of these moods which are said to be many, but the sixteenth century writer Kesava Das has classified them in his *Rasika Priya,* and artists of the Rajput, Kangra and Pahari schools have personified them in Nayikas or heroines :

(Some of the Nayikas are) :

(1) Nabodha : The shy girl frightened to meet her lover alone.
(2) Mughdha : A woman conscious of her charms.
(3) Sambhoga Nayika : One who looks forward to union with her lover.
(4) Swadhinapatika : One conscious of having her lover in subjection.
(5) Rupagarita : A woman given to affected resentment.
(6) Smarandha : A woman in blind love.
(7) Vipralabdha Nayika : A woman frustrated in love.
(8) Abhisarika : A love sick woman going out to meet her lover.
(9) Vasakasayya Nayika : The expectant heroine who waits for her lover at the doorway of her bedchamber.
(10) Prositapatika : A woman who suffers separation from her husband.
(11) Agata Bhartrika : A woman meeting her husband after long separation.

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It is, however, difficult to judge a woman by her apparent disposition. Women are clever at dissembling and can easily affect a mood quite different from what they are actually in. Hence, the wise man is asked to study certain physical conditions in women which give an indication of their true nature and destiny. The Hindus have great faith in palmistry and auspicious marks on the body, and have developed an elaborate literature on the subject, called Saumudrika Shastra. A student of this science, it is believed, can judge a person by his appearance and foretell his destiny. Kings in exile have been recognized by the mystic mark of the discus every royal person is supposed to have on the palm. In erotic literature too, auspicious signs and marks play an important part, and the lucky, the suitable and the desirable are often judged by these signs or marks.

Sita, the heroine of the *Ramayana*, on hearing the false news of her husband's death thus observes : "I do not see on my body the inauspicious marks that indicate widowhood. My hair is fine, glossy, and dark. My temples are well proportioned and eyes auspicious. My teeth are even. My thighs, legs, ankles and hands are well formed. My brows do not run together. My breasts are full, elevated and swell up leaving no gap between, and the nipples are deep set. My skin is smooth and transparent, and I stand firm on my ten toes and soles. So am I known as a woman with auspicious marks."*

Brows running together, while inauspicious in women, is a good sign in a man. "The peculiar make up of the hero is that he is tall, has a nose like a parrot's beak, straight looking eyes over-shadowed by brows that run together, and a disposition that is easily aroused and inclined to anger and strife."† A prominent nose and long arms are greatly prized in men. All the heroes of Hindu legend had hook noses and long arms that reached below the knees. "In men a big organ of smell is a great distinction. In the *Mahabharata*, Yudhishtra often parades his huge, long, hanging, handsome nose. Charudatta, the ideal man in *Mrichchakatika* has a very high arched nose. Bana in his *Harsha Charita* says in praise of Skanda Gupta's nose that it is as long as his pedigree. The big nose with the tip turned down is the mark of the hero and the king. The Aryan settlers in India in all probability were especially distinguished as noble from the aboriginal population by this characteristic also. A flat nose, on the other hand is a mark of ugliness.".

In arranged matches, parents of the bridegroom get only one or two chances to see the girl before accepting the proposal. Eligibility of a girl in such cases should be decided by bearing in mind the following points :

(1) A girl likely to make a good bride should be neither too tall nor too short, and must have a fair complexion and shapely body.

(2) Her gait must be like that of an elephant or swan, neither too brisk nor too slow. She must have tender feet and palms, and rosy tinted fingers.

(3) She must have large eyes, and a delicate, straight-cut, high-bridged nose.

(4) She must have a full set of even teeth of the colour of pearl, a neck shapely like the conch shell and thighs as smooth and round as the stem of the banana tree.

(5) Her hair must be black and smooth, moderate in quantity. Her voice must be sweet like the cuckoo's.

Undesirable types are :—

(1) A girl who is too thin or too short.

(2) A girl of black complexion.

(3) A girl with a face like a horse ;

(4) A girl with low shoulders, ugly thighs or a protuberant brow.

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* The *Ramayana*. † *Sexual Life in Ancient India*, Meyer.

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(5) A girl with rough and scaly skin.
(6) A blue-eyed girl.*
(7) A girl with a large mouth.
(8) A girl with obvious defects like cock-eye or lame leg.
(9) A girl who has a deficient or redundant finger or toe.
(10) One who has triangular ears or the third toe blunt and flat or whose little toe is raised.
(11) One who has perspiring hands and feet.
(12) One with an inauspicious name. The name of a star, river or tree is considered inauspicious, and also a name ending in the letter L or R.

Together with studying the physical appearance of the girl, the bridegroom's party are also exhorted to look for omens and the behaviour of the girl. If they find the girl sleeping on their arrival, they must immediately break off negotiations and seek a girl elsewhere. If the girl weeps, leaves the house or hides herself when the bridegroom's people call her, it is an obvious indication that she is not much in favour of the match.

The female members of the party will be in a position to study the girl at close quarters, and they may look for mystic marks on the person of the girl which would indicate her future. A girl having the mystic mark of the discus or lotus on the sole of her left foot is born to be a queen. A line extending from the little toe to the base of the big toe on the left sole of a girl's foot indicates happiness in married life. The mark of a circle or garland on a girl's left palm indicates the birth of heroes as sons. A girl with three lines round her neck will be fortunate.

A long neck in a maiden signifies ill-health and a cruel disposition, while a short neck denotes misery and selfishness. Girls whose toes are long or out of proportion to the rest of the foot are capable of fornication. A little toe that does not touch the ground indicates early widowhood. A maiden whose thighs and legs taper like an elephant's trunk is fortunate. The mark of the Ankusha (a spiked hook) on a girl's palm is indicative of royalty and noble motherhood.

A mole on the lip, whether in man or woman, means luck in love. One on the tip of the nose indicates a successsful career and an adventurous life. A black mole on any of the cheeks shows mediocrity and a red mole on the right temple, happiness after the age of thirty.

A bright eyed man is fortunate ; white, shining teeth ensure a supply of wholesome food ; a big head indicates kingship ; a wide waist, many wives and children. A man with soft, smooth skin will get beautiful beds to sleep on ; one with soft feet will get good vehicles to ride in.

The man with a long organ is destined to be poor, and one with a thick member is headed for unhappiness, while, 'the man who is called to high things and good fortune has a thin, short member, a smooth glans and hanging testicles.'

Before closing this chapter I would like to mention some local peculiarities Vatsyayana, and following him some other Hindu writers have mentioned. They studied the variations in sexual life obtaining among different peoples in India and elsewhere, mainly with the object of instructing travellers and merchants who had to visit many lands and live among strange women. A few of their observations are reproduced at random.

* Blue eyes, so admired in the West, are considered ugly in India. Blue eyes are called cats' eyes in India.

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Women of Madhyadesa were moderate in the expression of their desires. They loved flirting, courting and a straight union, but abhored all perverted and abnormal practices. They did not care for kissing, scratching and stroking, but used to take great delight in embraces.

Women of Avantipura also disliked kissing, scratching and stroking, but loved sexual congress in unusual postures.

Women of Malva and Abhira were very fond of being kissed, caressed and embraced, and could stand a good deal of biting and scratching provided these did not cause bruises or hurt.

Women of Lata country were of a passionate temperament and fond of strokes. A daughter of this land had a very artistic and beautiful body and danced with joy at the prospect of meeting her lover.

Women of Andhra and Karnataka were delicate and beautiful in appearance. Adepts in the art of love, they could be quite bold when excited.

Women of Strirajya were voluptuous. They delighted in hard blows and loved to mate with extraordinarily virile men. In the absence of such bulls, they resorted to the use of artificial methods for satisfying their powerful passion.

Women of Magadha and of Maharashtra were smiling beauties, well-versed in the sixty-four arts. They had, however, a strong sex nature and during congress indulged in strong language. Experts in the art of love, they took delight in petty quarrels. They dressed with taste and were capable of bold behaviour when roused.

Women of Nagara like those of Maharashtra, were fond of using strong language at the time of mating, but by nature they were gentle.

Women of Vanga were delicate as flowers and sweet smelling. They loved to be kissed and embraced but did not take kindly to scratching and biting. Gentle and sweet of speech, they were religious and fond of pilgrimages. They abhored obscene language even during sexual congress and hated those who used them.

Dravida women responded to men's advances quickly and an embrace was enough to melt them.

Women of Utkala were bold and fond of being scratched and hurt, and loved to play the male in sexual congress.

Women of Gurjara had beautiful eyes and were fond of finery. They delighted in the pleasures of love but were satisfied with the lighter, milder forms of love play. They had curly hair, slender bodies, heaving breasts and sweet voices.

Women of Kamarupa were sweet of speech. They were extremely sensitive and melted at the mere touch of men. Though fond of caresses, they disliked kissing, scratching and biting, and detested all forms of abnormal practices.

Women of Tirabhukhi had lotus-like eyes and were skilled in the art of love. The very sight of these beautiful women was enough to raise the most violent passion in men, but they were very loyal, and libertines often got into trouble with them.

Women of Malayala were well-proportioned in their build, sweet of speech and enthusiastic in love. They were however capable of bold behaviour during sexual congress but disliked perverted practices.

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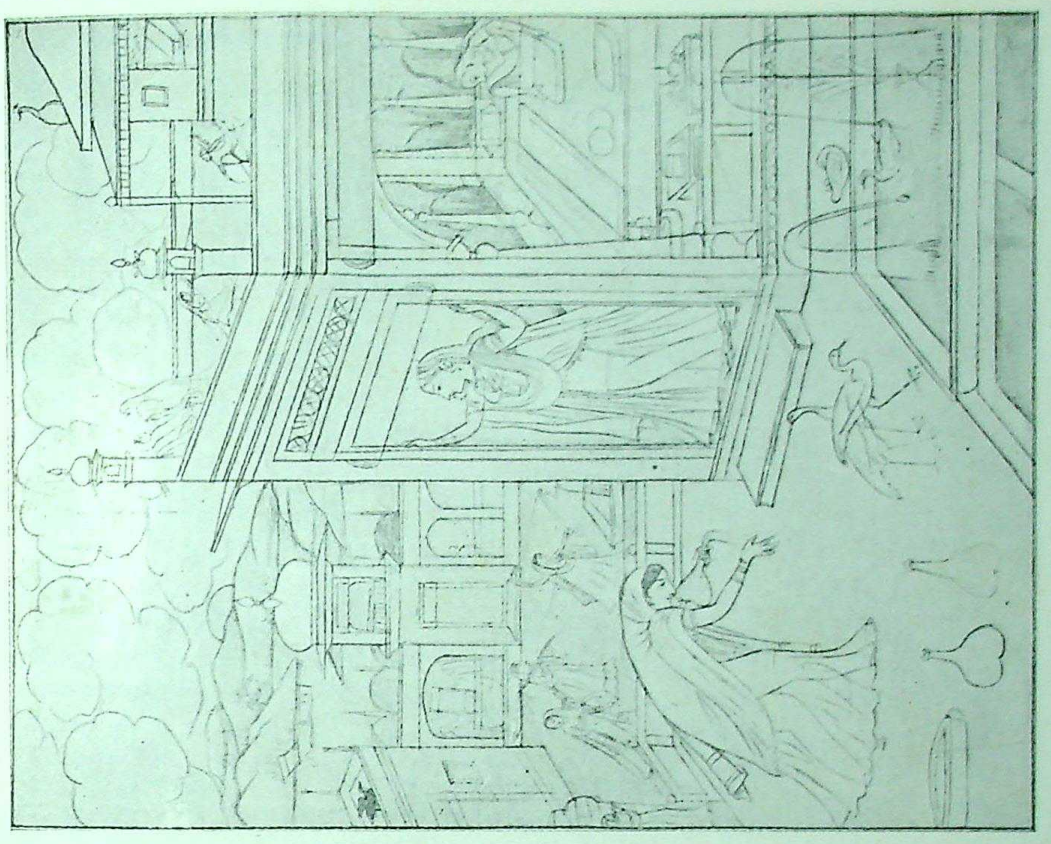
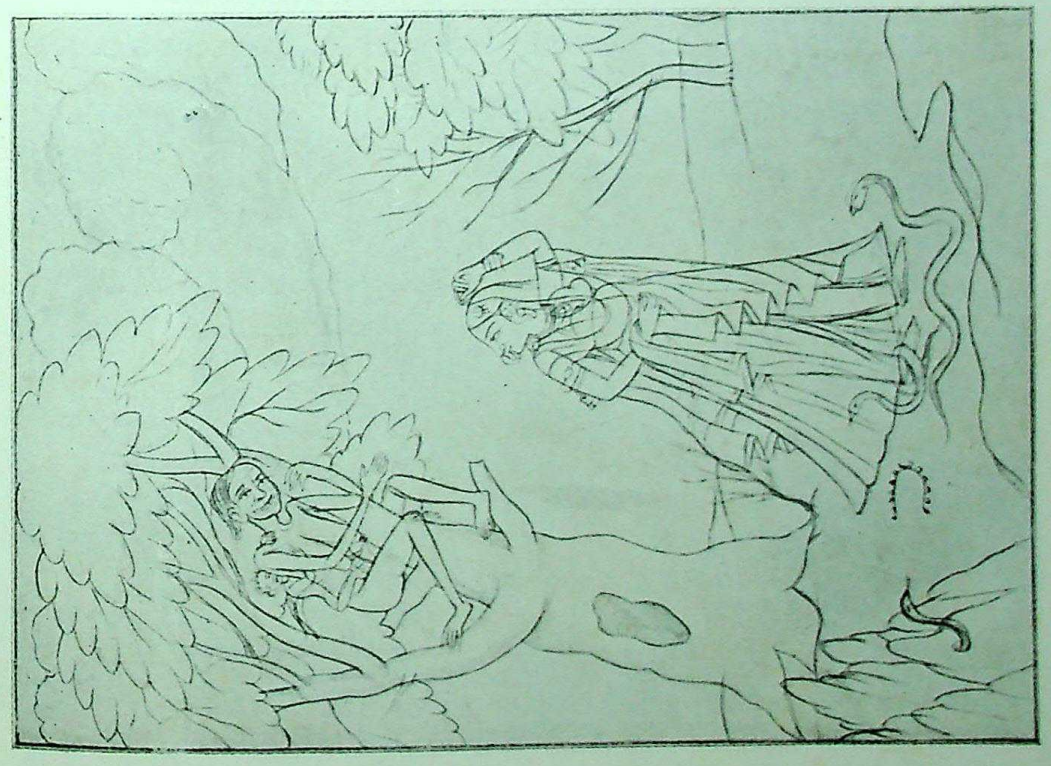
NAYIKAS



150 VASAKA SAYA

One who has received news of her lover's return from abroad and comes out to meet him. The crow on the roof on the left is announcing his return and the maid is putting everything in order.



149 ABHISARIKA

She who goes forth alone at night to meet her lover: The figure on the tree is a witch and serpents trail the Nayika's path but she is dauntless.

Pahari: 17-18th Century: *Coomaraswamy's Collection*

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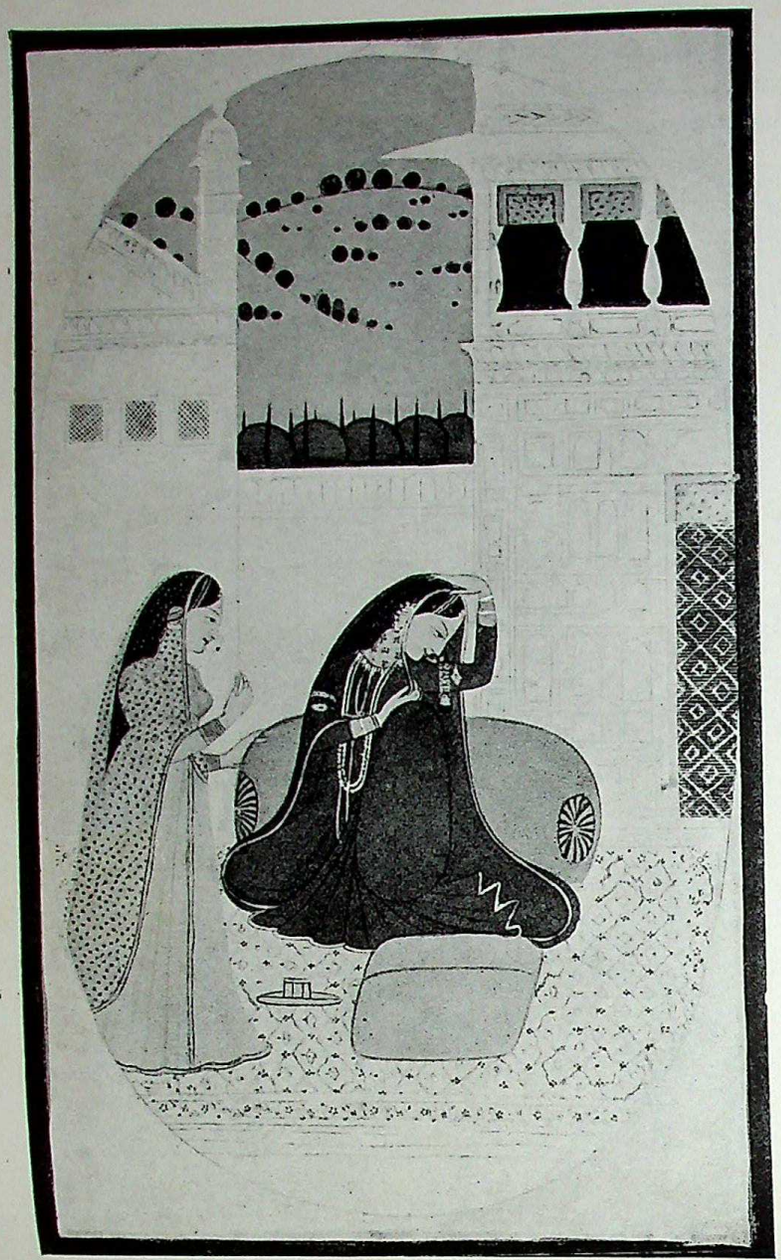
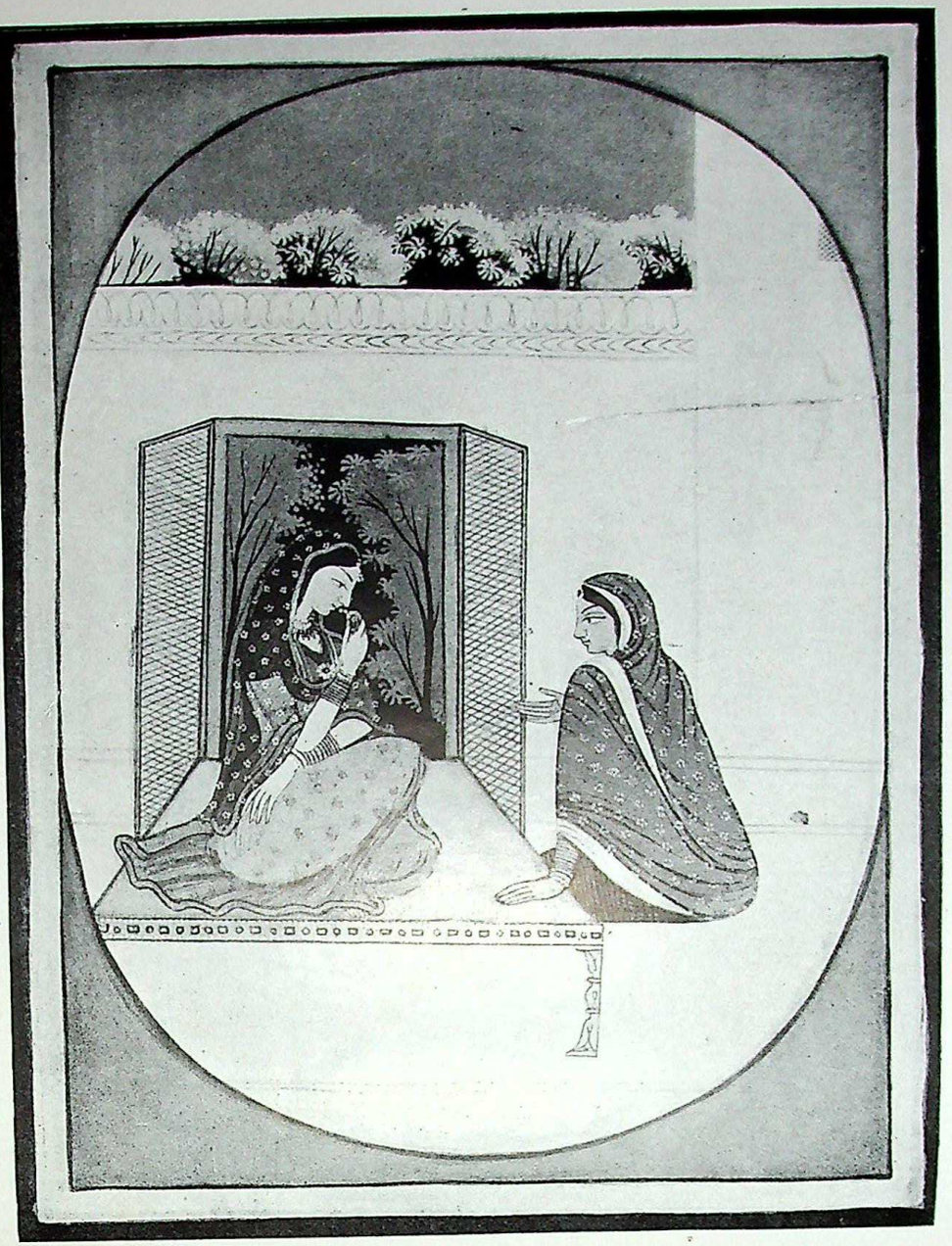


151 DUTIKA

A messenger conveying a message to a Nayika, seated gloomily with averted face.



152 PRUSITA PREYASI

One whose lover is gone abroad. The maid is giving her what solace she can.

Pahari, 17-18th Century : *Coomaraswamy's Collection*

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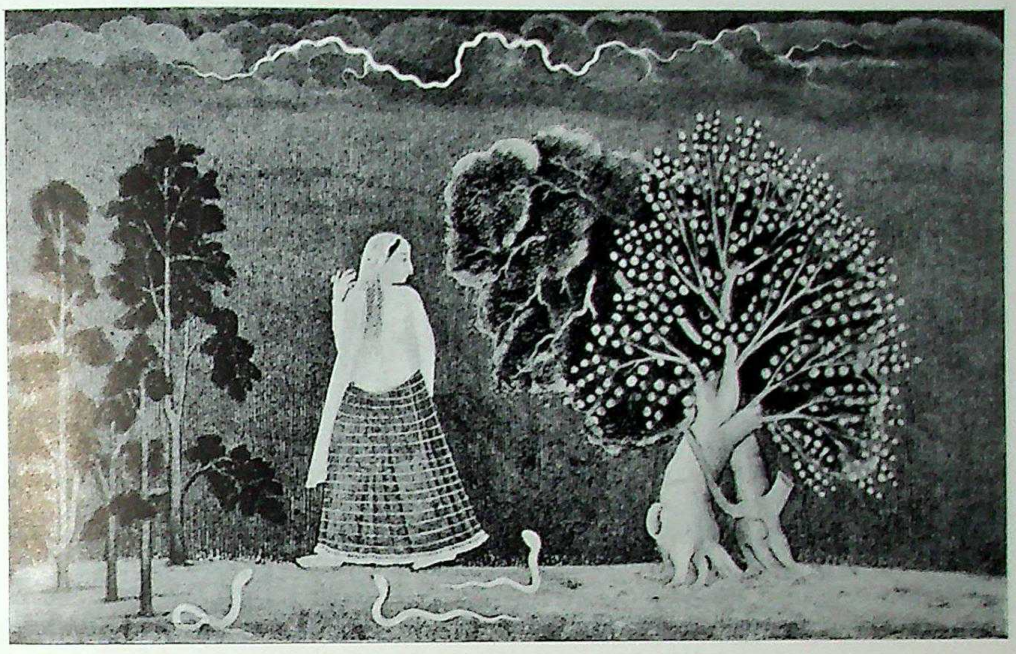
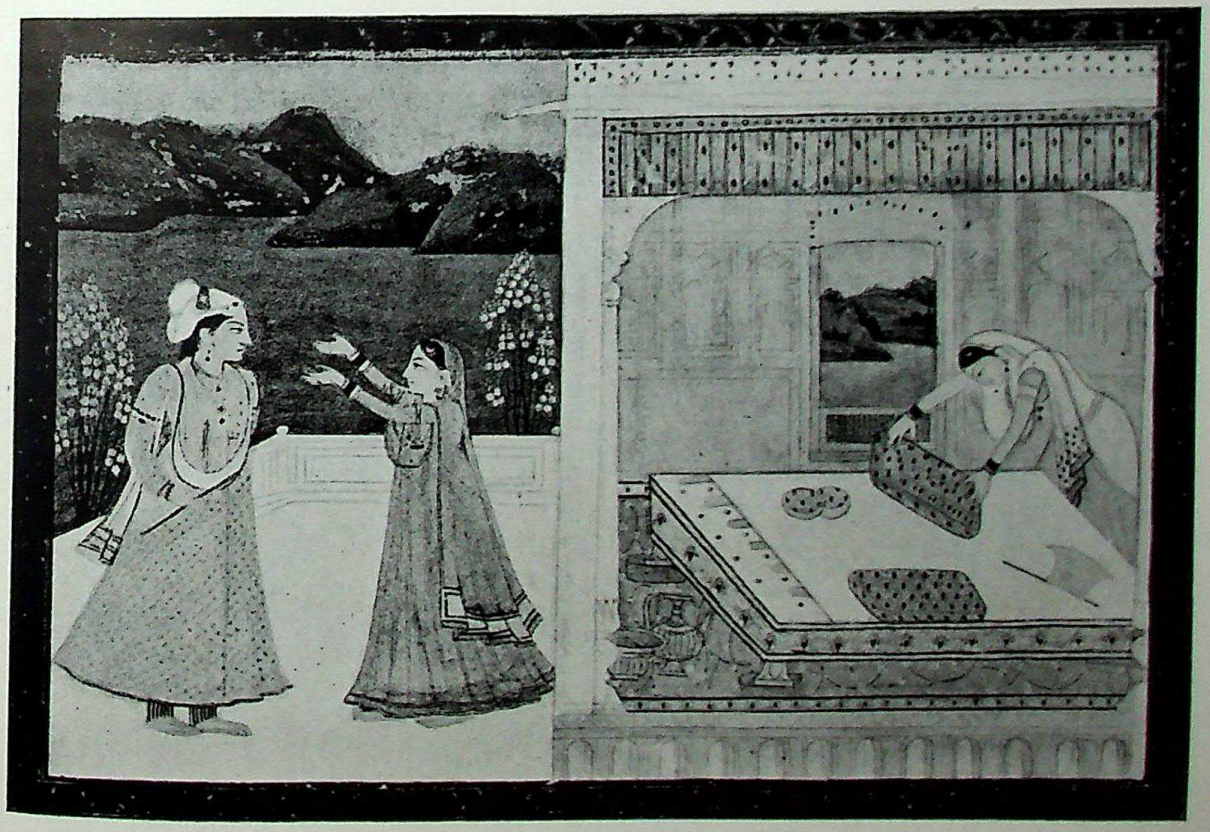


153 ABHISARIKA OR ONE WHO GOES FORTH TO MEET HER LOVER

The Abhisarika journeys through a forest in a night of rain and lightning to meet her lover



VASAKA SAYA

154 She meets her lover who has returned from abroad. The maid is preparing the bed for the lovers

Pahari: 17-18th Century: *Coomaraswamy's Collection*

DUTIKA

A messenger conveying a message to a Nayika, seated gloomily with averted face.

Pahari, 17-18th Century: *Coomaraswamy's Collection*

One whose lover is gone abroad. The maid is giving her what solace she can.

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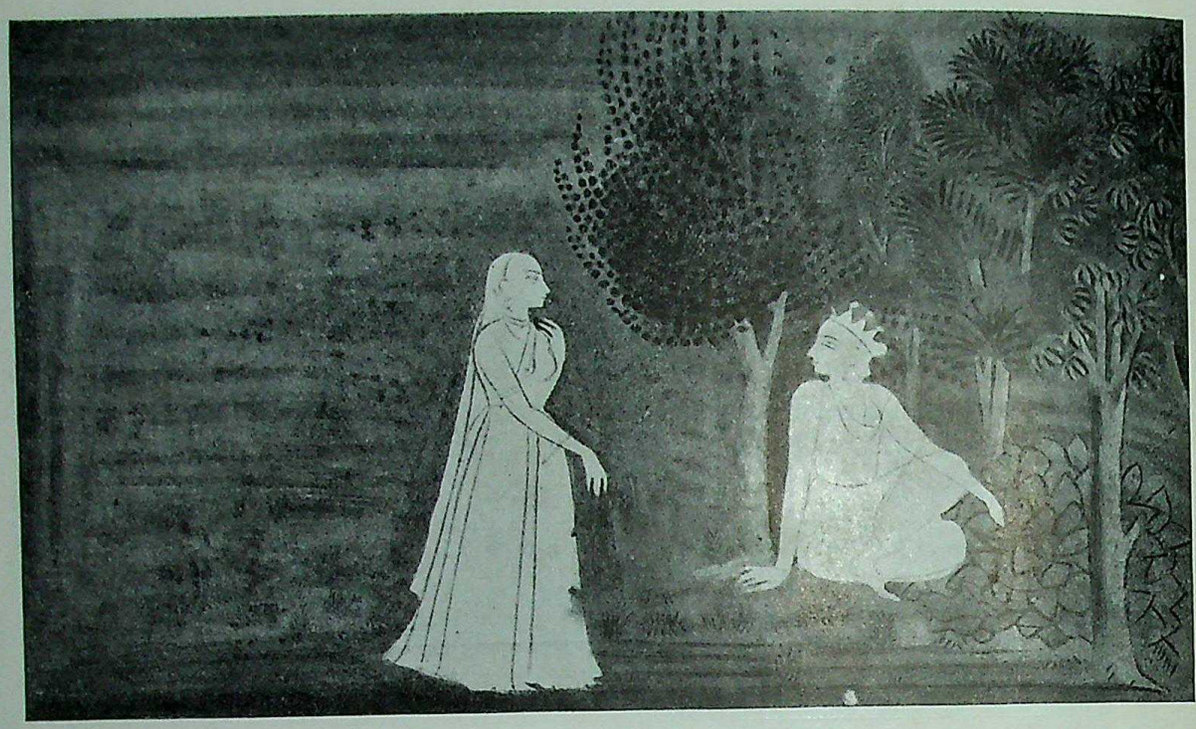
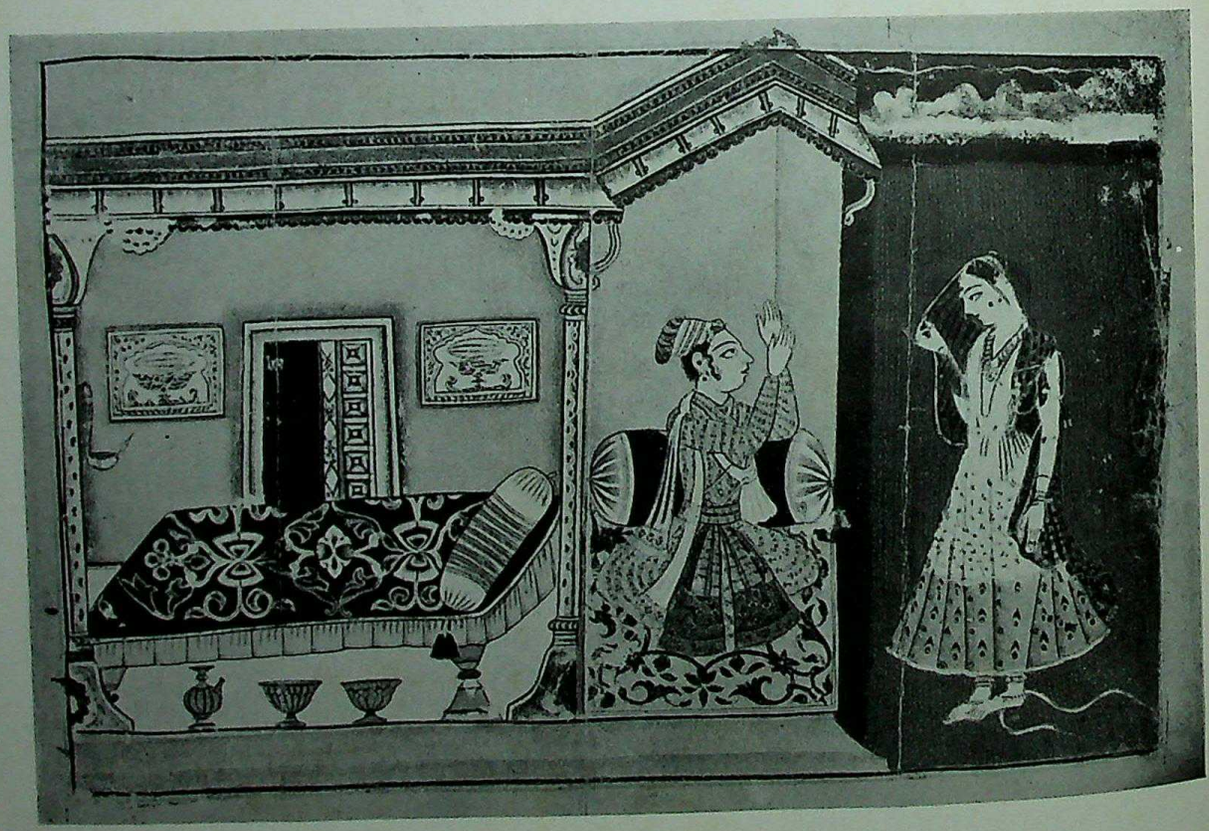


155 ABHISARIKA

After the perilous journey through the dark night she has reached her lover



156 ABHISARIKA

The joyful welcome by the lover of the bold Abhisarika who has reached her lover's home after a dangerous journey in a stormy night. The lover holds up his hands in approbation and wonder

Pahari, 17-18th Century : *Coomaraswamy's Collection*

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Chapter Twelve

DANGERS OF SEDUCTION

Hindu law-givers and moralists constantly remind men of the need for guarding their wives against the designs of evil men ; for "as the birds of prey sweep down on meat thrown on the ground do men swoop on an unprotected woman." Mere restriction on the liberty of women is however no guarantee against seduction. Evil men have many subtle ways of tempting women and a woman so tempted might elude the vigilance of the most jealous husband ; hence the best method of keeping a wife virtuous is to give her enough domestic responsibilities to preclude the possibility of leaving her time for intrigue.

Wives must be entrusted with the management of household affairs and kept constantly busy. Attention to cooking and keeping the house clean form the main responsibilities of women in middle class homes, and eternal bliss is promised in the scriptures to good housewives. Women who cook well are said to be the favourites of gods. The great Shiva is believed to have whiled away twelve years in pleasurably watching Arundhati, the most accomplished cook of the pantheon, cook a cucumber. Srutavati, the daughter of the learned Brahmin Bharadwaja won a god for her husband because of devotion to the culinary art. Good housekeeping is as dear to the gods as good cooking. "Where earthenware is strewn about or there are broken utensils or seats, in such a house, ruined by sinful dirt women perish. The gods and forefathers go back again hopeless on festivals and holy days from the house of sinful dirt. Broken utensils and bedsteads, cock and dog, and a tree growing by the house, these are all things bringing misfortune. In broken vessels dwells strife, the saying is, in the bedstead decay of wealth ; in the presence of cock and the dog, the gods eat not the sacrificial food ; in the foot of the tree dwells assuredly a goblin ; therefore the tree shall not be planted." *

The need for devotion to domestic duty in a woman is often emphasized in the epics :

Be it her duty to preserve with care
Her husband's substance ; let her be trusted
With the expenditure, with management
Of household property and furniture,
Of cooking and purviewing daily food,
Let her be ever cheerful, skilled in all
Domestic work and not to be free in spending.

Again, a good woman must know what to avoid :

Drink, bad companions, absence from her lord,
Rambling about, unseasonable sleep,
Dwelling in other's houses, let her shun,
These are six things that tarnish woman's fame.†

A dutiful wife must interest herself in gardening, in growing various kinds of vegetables for the kitchen and in cultivating fruit trees and flower plants. The decoration of the house and the altar of the family god should be her special delight.

In the presence of her husband, a woman must always appear cheerful. Harsh words and sulky looks are unbecoming in a good wife. If her husband goes astray he should be reclaimed to the path of virtue by sweet, persuasive methods but never by open antagonism. A show of slight annoyance is all that a lady is permitted to evince as a protest against the most objectionable behaviour of her husband. She must take care to avoid the company of vagrants, fortune tellers, magicians and necromancers.

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* The *Mahabharata*, Meyer. † The *Mahabharata*, Muir.

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When a husband comes home after work, a dutiful wife meets him at the entrance and after receiving him with a sweet smile asks him if she could be of any service to him. She then proceeds to bathe his feet and wipe them, never leaving this service to a menial. The faults of one's husband should never be discussed in the presence of others ; if he is a drunkard or libertine, she must speak to him in private and try to reclaim him by persuasion but not by threats or antagonism.

A wife must always take pains to understand the tastes of her husband in the matter of food and dress, and please him by all possible means. She must know that perspiration, unclean teeth and bad body odour are impediments to successful love making. In the bedchamber a sensible wife must apppear beautifully attired and adorned with flowers and jewels. A dutiful wife goes to bed after her husband, and gets up before him. When he is asleep, he should not be awakened.

When her husband is away or gone on a long journey, a dutiful wife must lead an austere life and keep religious vows strictly so that he may be saved from all harms and return home quick and safe. She should dispense with all ornaments and personal adornments. She must, besides, take charge of his business, if he has any, and conduct it skilfully taking advice from reliable employees and close relatives. While religious duties should receive her attention, she should not leave her house for attending festivals or temple processions.

Hindu sages summarise the qualities of the ideal wife as follows : "The ideal wife is a nurse in illness, a drudge in housekeeping, a wise counsellor in calamity, a mother in tenderness, the earth herself in patience* and a harlot in bed."

The punishments prescribed in Hindu law books for adultery were most severe. This was particularly so where women of the three higher castes were concerned. An adulteress was considered more fallen than a Brahmanicide, the most abandoned criminal in the Hindu Penal Code of the time. All adultery was not, however, equally heinous, and punishments varied from death penalty to mere fines. When a man tempted a woman of his own caste or higher caste, his crime was considered particularly heinous. In addition to the punishments meted out to him in this world he was threatened with chastisements in the life to come. "He that touches another man's wife is born as a wolf, as a dog, as a jackal, then born as a vulture, a snake, a heron and also as a hen crane." He who seduced his spiritual preceptor's wife was considered more fallen than other adulterers and "is born five lives as a swine, ten as a porcupine, then as a cock, an ant and a worm."

Adultery itself had many gradations. Speaking with another man's wife in an unseemly manner, winking or smiling at her, touching her garment or any part of her body, sitting with her on the same seat, caressing her hair and similar actions constituted adultery though not of the same objectionable nature as actual coitus. Sending her gifts or messages were also considered punishable. Even thinking of another man's wife was thought adultery of a sort, though for obvious reasons it could not be punished by the State.

But the charm of women has always prevailed over the laws of the pious. In fact the greatness of the sermon only shows how deep seated is human leaning to sin. Not only romantic literature and fiction but even the scriptures narrate stories of men and women who have succumbed to the weakness of the flesh.

Not only mortals but even gods have erred in this matter. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, a myth tells us, once made a joint effort to seduce the chaste Anasuya, wife of the venerable sage Atri, for which rash act they paid dearly.†

* The Hindus consider the earth as the symbol of patience. The earth is said to bear the aggregate sins of mankind. The surface of the earth is wet by the blood of carnage, is disfigured by the ravages of the ploughman, and her bowels are ripped open by miners ; she not only suffers all these injuries patiently, but even rewards the ravishers.

† For a description of the story refer to *Epics, Myths & Legends of India* (Taraporevala).

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Even the pure and upright Agni (the fire god) once fell a victim to the attractions of the wives of the Seven Sages. Chandra, the handsome moon god, once developed an unholy passion for Tara, wife of Brihaspati, preceptor of the gods, and abducted her. More heinous than this was the crime of Indra, king of the gods, who seduced Ahalya wife of Gautama, his own spiritual preceptor.

When such was the leaning of gods to sin, the plight of mortals could very well be imagined.

Vatsyayana had made a detached study of the ways of the seducer. Conditions that led men to seek other peoples' wives were thus enumerated :

(1) An unprincipled man in distress without any means of livelihood tried to make some money by approaching a wealthy lady prone to temptation.

(2) A man robbed of his wealth by an enemy tried to seduce the latter's wife with the intention of regaining his wealth through her.

(3) An unscrupulous man bent upon assassinating an enemy worked on the latter's wife with the intention of making a willing or innocent accomplice of her.

(4) A man whose wife was seduced by another tried to seduce the latter's wife.

(5) An ambitious politician or adventurer tried to seduce the wife of a rival out of political considerations.

(6) State spies who wished to obtain secrets from important personages often corrupted their wives to gain their ends.

(7) Even good men were at times tempted to approach beautiful married women known to be free with their charms.

Sometimes, a decent man with no particular inclination to wickedness fell a victim to lovesickness and tried to seduce a married woman of exceptional charm. According to Kalyanmalla there were ten stages of lovesickness the last of which marked the imminence of the lover's death through despair. In this dangerous stage, a man at times contrived the seduction of the woman he loved. The stages of lovesickness which ultimately could prove fatal were :

(1) The kindling of love at first sight which was discernible by a peculiar tenderness in the eyes of the lover.

(2) Hallucinations and a delusive feeling that the absent lady was near about.

(3) Restlessness of mind arising out of planning schemes to get access to the lady.

(4) Sleepless nights.

(5) Loss of appetite and consequent undernourishment and ill health.

(6) Raving and breaking all laws of decency and decorum.

(7) Occasional expression, by word of mouth, of suicidal tendencies.

(8) Mental unbalance and signs of insanity.

(9) Fainting fits, the result of ill health and mental exhaustion.

(10) Collapse indicating approaching death.

In the last stage, the lover stopped at nothing.

Women who would not be easily seduced were thus described :

(1) A woman of low sexual ardour.

(2) Wife of a vigilant husband.

(3) A lady mourning the death of a near relative.

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(4) A woman very much attached to her children.
(5) A lady who values the good name of her family.
(6) A lady who wishes to avoid scandal.
(7) A dutiful wife in genuine love with her husband.
(8) A religious woman.
(9) Wife of an able and powerful man, stern towards all sinners.
(10) A lady with natural reserve.

Young wives of old men, or men of low sexual vigour, wives of corpulent, impotent, miserly or mean men, hunchbacks, dwarfs and drunkards were easily led astray. A neglected, ill-treated, or superseded wife also fell an easy prey to designing men.

Even virtuous women at times developed a dislike for their husbands for the following reasons :

(1) Vanity in a husband who was inclined to treat his wife with condescension or contempt.
(2) Constant ill-health of the husband.
(3) Separation of the husband for long periods.
(4) A husband's ignorance of the ways of women and the art of love.
(5) Harsh words and ill-treatment.
(6) Unfounded suspicion.
(7) Poverty.
(8) Want of refinements in a husband.

An unscrupulous seducer always studied the causes that make women unhappy and fanned the fire of revenge in an ill-treated or suspected wife for the furtherance of his designs. A seducer too, like a lover wooing a bride, employed intermediaries. These intermediaries, always women, were of eight types :

(1) Nishishtartha or plenipotentiary : She was a trusted confidante upon whose intelligence the seducer had complete faith. She had full power to act on his behalf, and was left to herself to find out ways and means to win over the woman.

(2) Parimithartha or messenger of limited power : The power of this dignitary, as the name indicates, was limited. After the victim had expressed her desire to meet the seducer, the intermediary was used to bring the intrigue to a successful end. She arranged the meeting place for the sinners and acted as a companion to the woman if the latter had to leave her house to a distant place to meet her paramour.

(3) Patrahari or letter-bearer : She took love letters or verbal messages from the seducer to his victim. She was employed only after the secret lovers had made their wishes known to each other.

(4) Swayamdooti or self-messenger : This person, out of sheer altruism worked for the seducer. She was an intimate lady friend of his.

(5) Muddhadooti or foolish messenger : This simpleton was the innocent wife of a designing man who used her to get access to another woman without her suspecting it, and was a friend or acquaintance of her. She was most skilfully used after the husband had established contact with the woman. By clever instruction, the designing woman taught the 'foolish messenger' what to tell her husband during sexual congress and these verses or epigrams conveyed definite messages to the husband. By pretending intimacy, she imprinted nail marks and teeth marks on the 'foolish messenger', the import of which was plain

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157 VIBHASA RAGA
Represented as Kama shooting a crowing cock
Rajput School : 17th Century A. D.

158 VARARI RAGINI
Represented as a prince embracing his beloved.
Rajput School : 17th Century A. D.

Ragas and Raginis are melody-modes. With the introduction of Persian forms during Muslim period the science of music developed many subtle characteristics in India, and the fancy of poets and artists gave visible forms to some of the pretty theories of musicians. Ragas are broad male melodies, six in number, each with five Raginis or female melodies for wives ; each Ragini has six Putras or sons (very subtle melodies). The more pleasing members of this prolific family have been portrayed by artists of the Mogul and Rajput Schools (16-19th Century)

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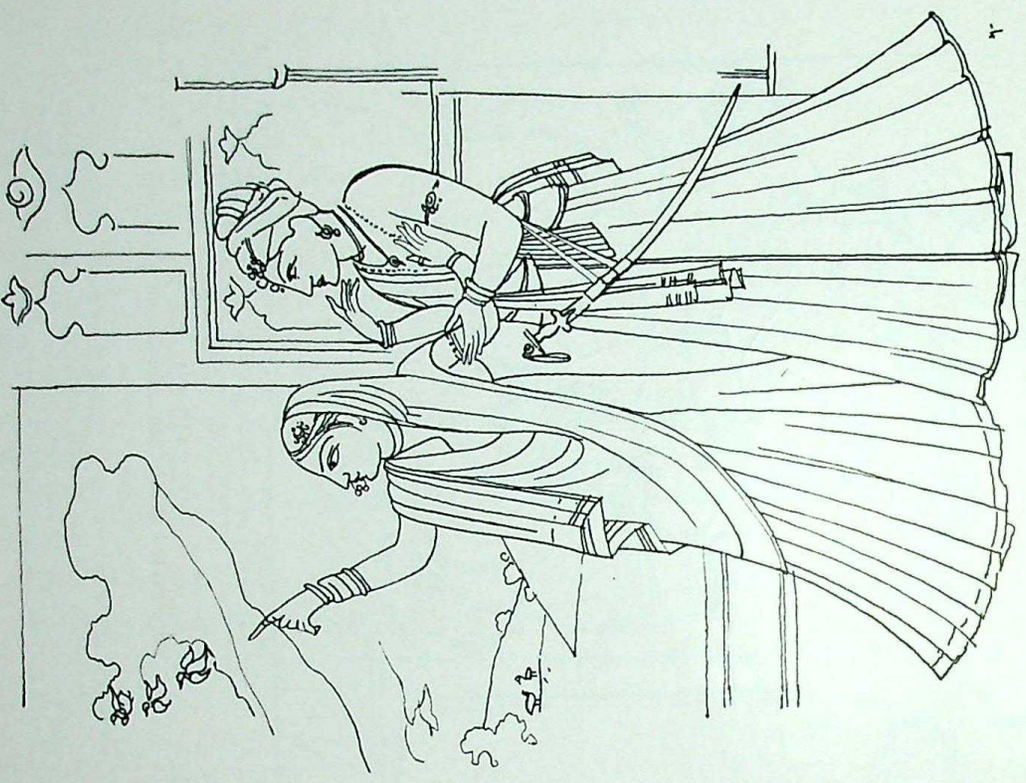
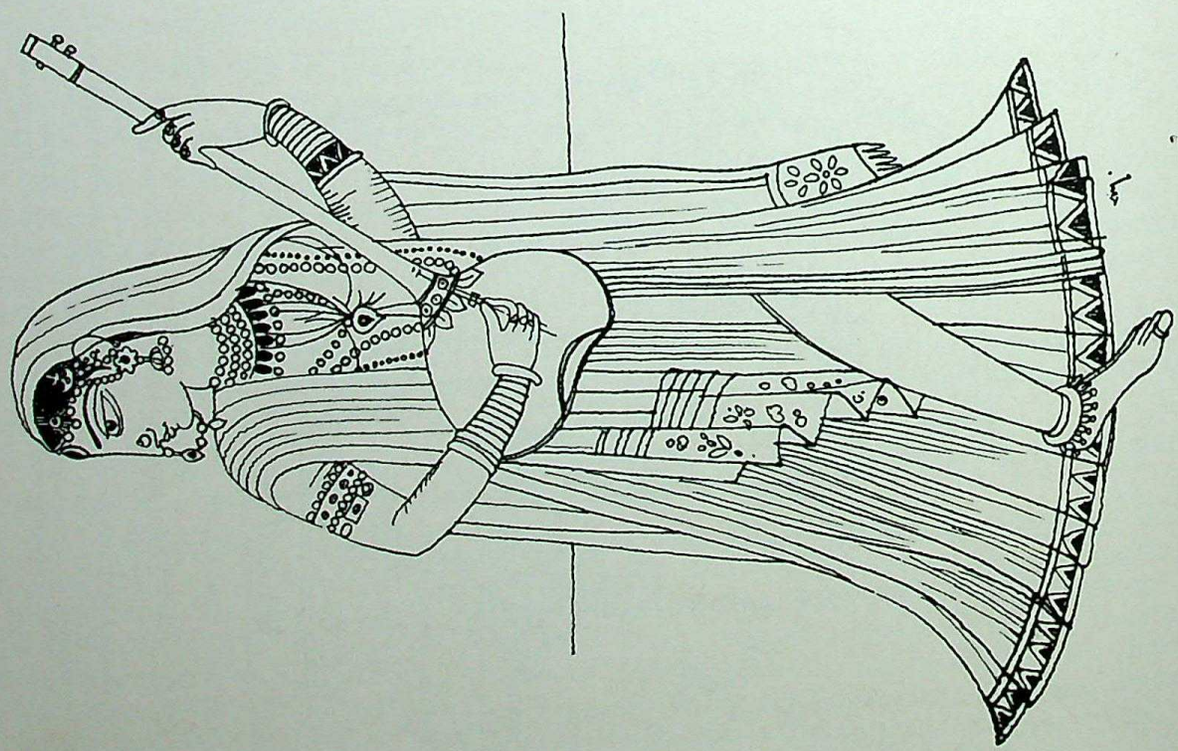


160 SAMBHOGA RAGINI
Represented as two lovers watching a landscape
Rajput School: 17th Century A. D.



159 TODI RAGINI
Represented as a dancing lady musician
Pahari School: 18th Century A. D.

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159 TODI RAGINI
Represented as a dancing-lady musician
Pahari School : 18th Century A. D.

160 SAMBHOGA RAGINI
Represented as two lovers watching a landscape
Rajput School : 17th Century A. D.

161 RADHA AND KRISHNA IN THE FIELDS OF BRINDABAN
Represented as a Ragini
Rajput School : 17th Century. *Art of India and Pakistan*, Leigh Ashton

162 KANADA RAGINI
A melody pleasing as a beautiful lady in a lovely garden
Rajput School : 17th Century. *Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay*

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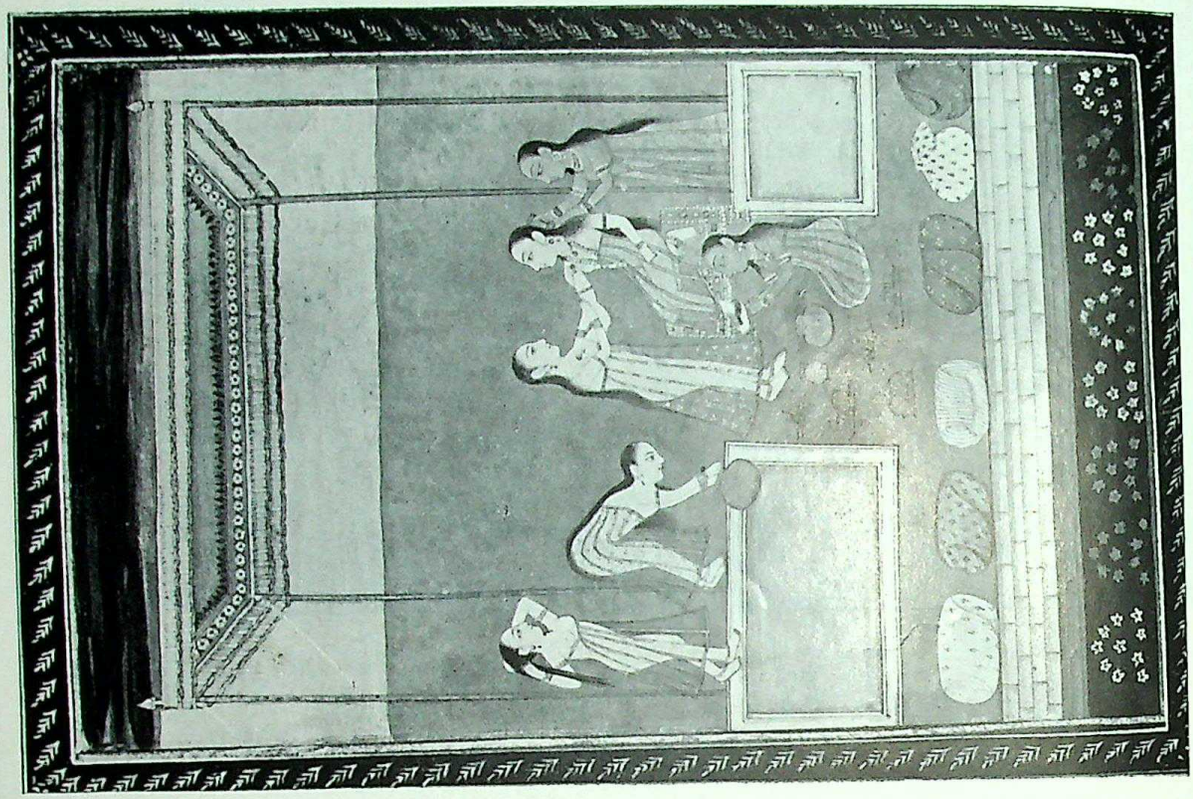
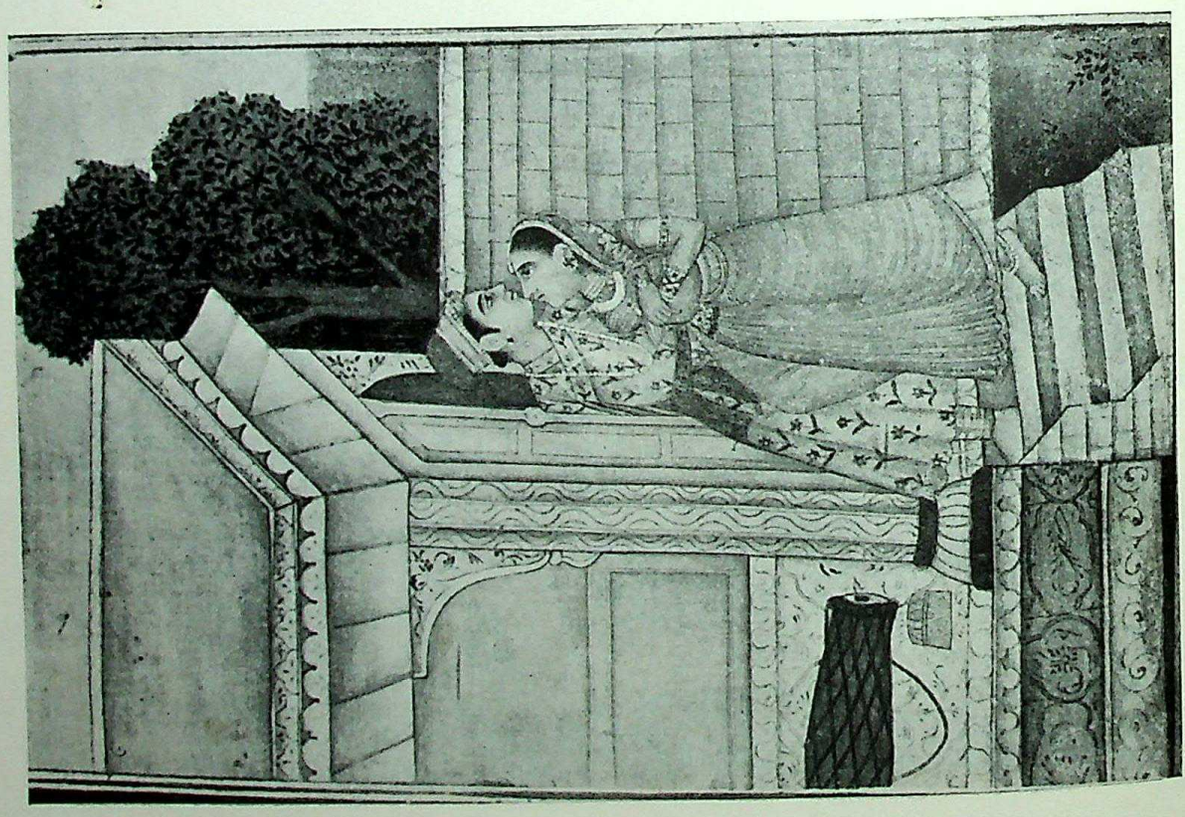


164 A RAGA REPRESENTED AS A BATHING SCENE
Mogul School, Hyderabad, Deccan: 18th Century A. D.



163 A RAGINI SWEET AS A LOVE SCENE
Mogul School: 17th Century A. D.

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to the husband. This rogue responded by apporpriate words or nail marks, and the 'fool' was thus used as an effective messenger between the two till the time came when her services could be dispensed with.

(6) Bharyadooti or wife messenger : This person was not so stupid as No. 5, but the secret lovers were sufficiently clever to hide their intentions and use her. She was of necessity, friendly with the lady on whom her husband had designs, and the latter taught her how to behave in the presence of her friend ; this behaviour was pregnant with meaning to the lady and she responded by appropriate actions.

(7) Mukadooti or deaf-mute messenger : This was a young girl, as innocent as a deaf-mute, as far as love was concerned. She took from the paramour to his lady seemingly innocent presents such as toys or books in which were concealed love letters or valuable articles which women prized. The girl was incapable of suspecting anything.

(8) Vatadooti or wind-messenger : She came and went like the wind. She was not a permanent messenger but one picked up for sending an urgent message.

In the matter of temptation all women were not alike but of different make. Women with different dispositions required different techniques. The fair ones, according to their dispositions, were classified into nine by Kalyanmalla :

(1) The goddess : She was of divine disposition and was always cheerful, contented and sweet of speech.

(2) The Yakshi : She was fair like the Champaka flower but possessed the disposition of unprincipled Yakshas and voluptuous Yakshis, dependents of Kubera, the god of wealth. She had fleshy breasts, was fond of heady drinks and looked for sexual pleasures with eagerness.

(3) The Gandharva : She was musical like the Gandharvas, the celestial musicians. She was fond of dancing and acting and dressed with taste. In sexual matters she was inclined to free love.

(4) The humane woman : Kind, hospitable and religious, she was an amiable type. Though disliking sinful adventures, she was incapable of resistence if properly approached.

(5) The devil : This was a woman with a short, dark body and an ugly face. Of unclean habits, she was cruel but cheerful. She was vindictive and was approached with caution.

(6) The snake : Of slimy habits, she was fond of wandering but always in a hurry. Very fond of sleep, she yawned frequently.

(7) The crow : A woman who fretted over nothing, had rolling eyes and was gluttonous besides had the disposition of the crow.

(8) The ass : A woman who was wicked and voluptuous, whose voice was as unpleasant and annoying as the braying of an ass was known to possess an ass-like disposition. She hated water and washing.

During certain occasions women fell an easy prey to designing men : During the lassitude that followed strenuous exercise in sports or in dancing, a woman was easily led to the embrace of a designing man. In the middle stages of pregnancy, after a long period of abstinence, a month after childbirth, and just after the purificatory bath following the monthly ailment, the libido of a woman was believed to be at the highest. The beginning of a mild illness was also a favourable occasion for corrupting women, as at that time their resistence was at the lowest and they craved for masculine sympathy and support. The spring and rainy seasons were exceptionally suited for courting or seducing women.

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We have already noticed elsewhere some of the reasons that made married women unhappy, and intelligent men were warned to give their wives no cause for disaffection. But however careful a man could be, some women were likely to develop an interest in men other than their husbands, and hence men were warned to watch the behaviour of their wives constantly and carefully. When a woman lost interest in her husband she was likely to act in the following manner :

(1) Showed no pleasure in sexual congress with him.
(2) When kissed by him wiped her lips.
(3) Showed reluctance to look him straight in the face.
(4) Shook the limbs when fondled or caressed by him.
(5) Replied harshly or evasively to his querries.
(6) Went to bed before he was ready to sleep.
(7) Slept with her back towards him.
(8) Got up early in the morning before her husband.
(9) Yawned when he told her interesting stories.
(10) Showed delight at his discomfiture.
(11) Showed pleasure on his departure from the house and displeasure on his return.
(12) Talked indifferently to his friends.
(13) Praised his enemies.
(14) Showed no signs of jealousy when he talked of his peccadillos with other women.
(15) Interrupted him in his conversation.
(16) Spoke of his shortcoming to her friends.
(17) Scratched her head when he spoke.

When his wife showed any of these signs of unrest or indifference, the wise man made efforts to find out the cause of the trouble and proceeded to remedy it. A woman, to be sure, never confessed by word of mouth to a hatred of her husband, but her behaviour could be as eloquent as words, and to the intelligent man this should give all the information he wanted on the point.

The dangers of seduction so far described applied mainly to the ordinary citizen who coveted the wife of his equal. Kings and nobles who were too distinguished to contact women outside their harems without raising public scandal resorted to special methods of seduction.

It was not humanly possible for a king or noble with over a hundred wives to satisfy the sexual cravings of all of them, and Vatsyayana advised the use of artificial methods of coitus for the benefit of the women of the harem. He also gave fair warning to kings about women smuggling men into the harem with or without the knowledge of the palace guards. The occasion usually used for getting men into the harem was when the guards changed duty. During festivals and ceremonial occasions when the palace had to be decorated, artisans and workmen came in and went out of the palace, and the ladies of the harem took advantage of these opportunities to smuggle men into their apartments in the guise of workmen. When the court moved from one place to another for pleasure or pilgrimage, the camp consisting of women was often left without protecting walls and men easily got access to the harem on these occasions. Further, the departure of the king on a military expedition or for the hunt necessitated his leaving a good part of the women of the harem behind ; during his absence vigilance naturally became less strict and intrigues were carried on by the women without much inconvenience or fear of detection.

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A king too at times developed an interest in a commoner's wife, in spite of all the pleasures the many women of the palace afforded. But he could not, for obvious reasons, visit the lady in public or even in her own house. Vatsyayana, tells us that kings in such cases got the lady into the palace. A daring king sent messengers to her house who, as if not knowing the king in person, asked the lady to form an acquaintance with some influential woman of the harem so as to promote the welfare of her husband. The messengers helpfully suggested the name of a lady in the palace, and introduced the victim to this person. Once she started visiting the harem, the king saw to it that she was shown the most magnificent halls and pleasure gardens of the palace. She was cunningly led to solitary parks or pleasure pools by the messengers, and the king as if by accident, came across the party, when the messengers quietly withdrew leaving His Majesty to deal with the situation in person.

Festivals in ancient and medieval India were celebrated in right royal fashion, and the palaces on these occasions presented an attractive spectacle. Ladies of the nobility usually visited the palace during the festivities for fun and for forming social connections. Many of the arranged matches of the aristocracy were started off from here, as the matrons often came with their young daughters and old women had plenty of opportunities for meeting eligible female candidates for marriage.

An unprincipled king who had an eye on a noble's wife or daughter at times used this occasion for seducing her through skilful accomplices.

पुस्तकालय
गुरुकुल काँगड़ी

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Chapter Thirteen

THE COURTESAN AND HER WILES : A WARNING TO MEN

Ancient Hindu society recognized and developed two classes of women : The bond housewife devoted to her husband and domestic duties, and the woman of the city. The bond woman was confined to the home and the main object of her life was childbearing ; as a wife she had a certain status but hardly any individuality. The courtesan, on the other hand, was free and gay and she lived to please men. Social intercourse prohibited between the sexes, and courtship generally denied to the respectable classes, during certain phases of Hindu social development the male could only display his spirit of emulation in sexual matters where the courtesan was concerned ; hence during these phases the courtesan occupied an important position in society, the same position, in fact, as was held by the hetæra in ancient Greece.

It is hardly necessary to mention that in modern India prostitution is held in abhorence. It is tolerated in certain cities as a necessary social evil but active efforts are being made to abolish it.

In the *Mahabharata* we read of courtesans as forming part of a king's retinue or camp. On special occasions when a king wished to honour distinguished visitors, the courtesans of the capital were ordered to go out and receive them at the city gates. Similarly, a hero returning to the city after conquest of foes was received by the fair charmers of the city.

In medieval India what men prize as desirable accomplishments were generally denied to women ; respectable women were not allowed to learn music or dancing ; even literacy was denied to them ; and the most respectable women were those who never stirred out of their homes. Under these conditions, the wife degenerated into a household article and a man of taste and culture could not find in his wife intellectual or cultural company. The courtesans, on the other hand, cultivated all the arts that attract men. They were accomplished singers and dancers and their establishments were tastefully furnished and decorated with a view to lull the senses and capture the heart. A good courtesan had also considerable literary taste, and often competed with poets and authors in the art of composing verses extempore. She patronized men of letters, painters and sculptors who often visited her establishments for the pleasures of the intellect and the senses. She was free to go about as she pleased, and on occasions of public festivities rode through city streets with a retinue of young courtesans and pages. Proprietors of theatres and other places of public amusements looked to her for patronage. It was a pleasure and a privilege for a man to be seen in her company, and merchants and noblemen often paid her enormous sums to be shown special attention in public, to say nothing of the fabulous sums she demanded for more real pleasures in private. In one of the *Jatakas* we read of a courtesan who charged a lover 5,000 gold pieces as her fee for a single hour !

In Vatsyayana's time, the courtesan was the ruler of high society. Gentlemen of fashion were visited by courtesans who were entertained lavishly in the front halls from where the wives were excluded. Men who wished to impress their greatness upon friends and the public took beautiful courtesans with them when they went on hunting expeditions or paid social calls. To be known as possessing an accomplished courtesan as mistress was a coveted honour for a wealthy man, and he often made a public exhibition of his mistress and himself.

The establishment of a prince in ancient India consisted of a regiment of courtesans who danced and sang in the court for his own pleasure and for the entertainment of distinguished visitors. Kautilya, author of the *Artha Sastra* the most authoritative work on ancient Hindu statecraft, has an interesting chapter on courtesans. All the women of pleasure of the court were under a chief courtesan who was selected to this honour mainly because of her beauty and accomplishments. She was paid almost the wages of a minister.

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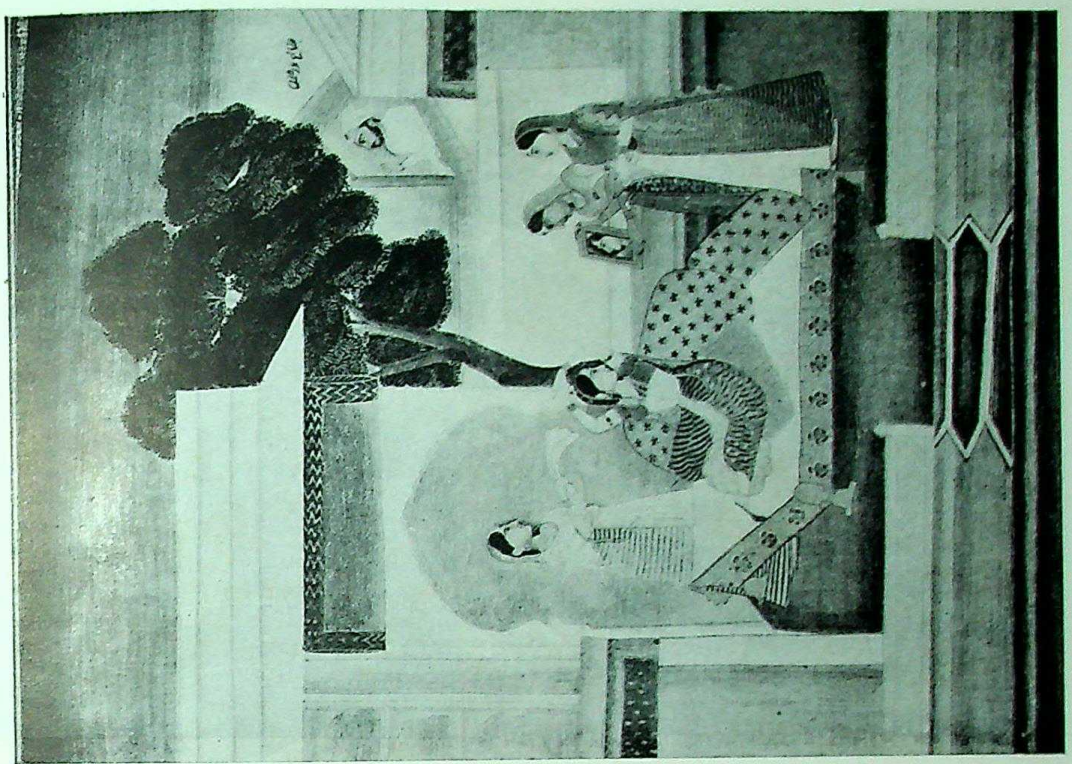
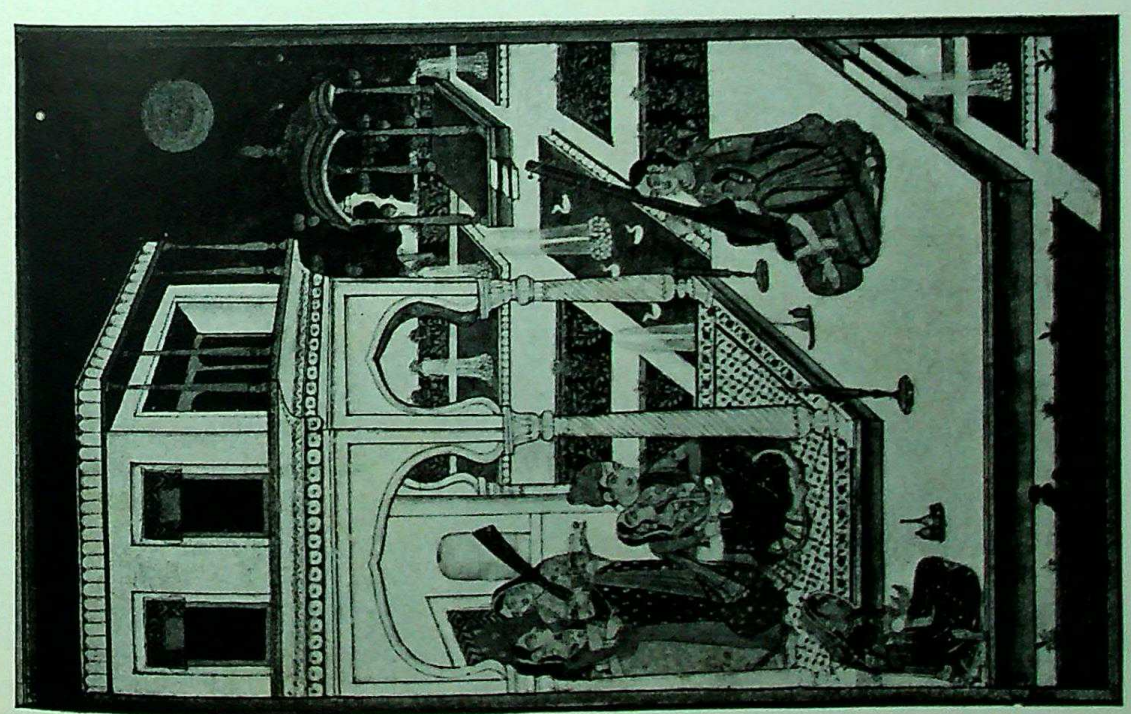


160 THE FINAL LOOK OF SATISFACTION
Rajput School: 17th Century A. D. *La Peinture Indienne*, Stchoukine



165 SORATH RAGINI
The melody for Royal Lovers
Rajput School: 17th Century A. D. *Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay*

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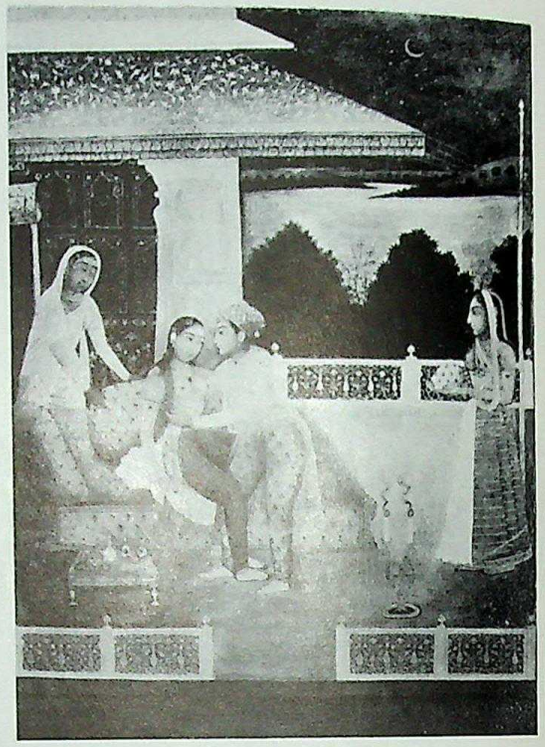
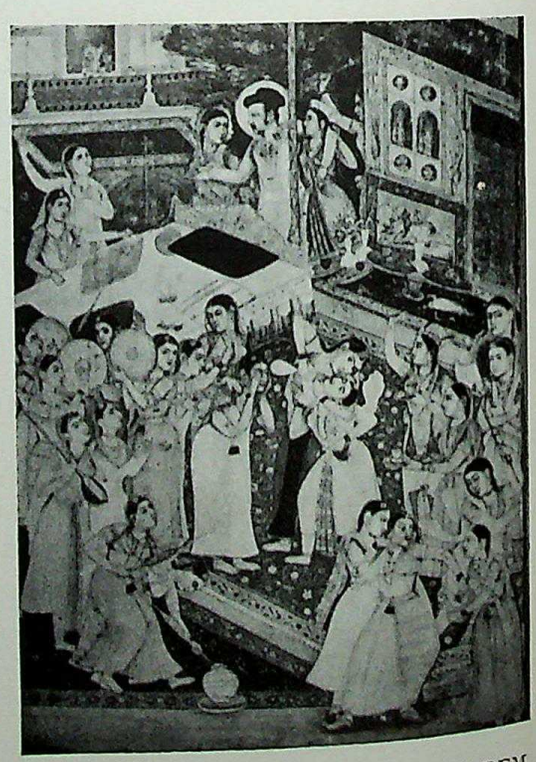
167 RADHA'S TOILET
Rajput School: 17th Century A. D.
From *La Peinture Indienne*, Stchoukine



168 RAJPUT LOVERS
Rajput School: 17th Century A. D.
From *La Peinture Indienne*, Stchoukine

169 DIPAKA RAGA
A royal melody for a royal couple
Rajput School: 17th Century A. D.
From *La Peinture Indienne*, Stchoukine



170 A PRINCE PLAYING HOLI IN HIS HAREM
Mogul Miniature Painting: 16th Century A. D.
Library of A. Chester Beatty

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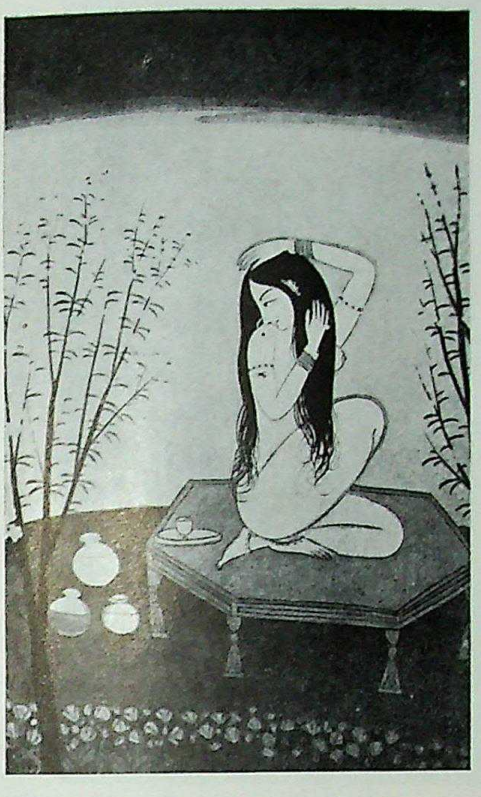
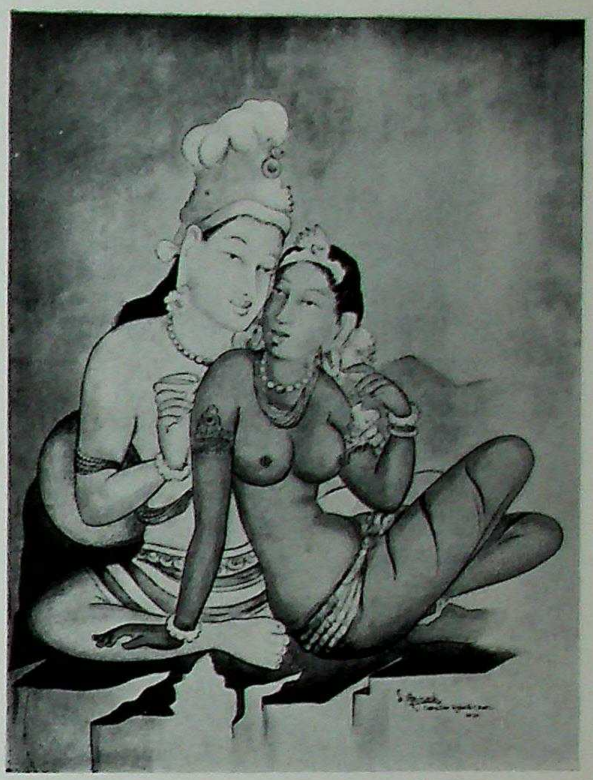


171 RADHA AFTER HER BATH
Rajput: 17th Century
Coomaraswamy's Collection



172 A PRINCE AND HIS CONSORT
Ajanta: 6th Century A. D.

173 RADHA AND KRISHNA SHELTERING FROM RAIN
Rajput School: 17th Century
Coomaraswamy's Collection

174 TODI RAGINI REPRESENTED AS A SEATED LADY MUSICIAN
Mixed Mogul and Rajput School: 17th Century A.D.
Govt. Art Gallery, Calcutta

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175 A JEALOUS LADY UPBRAIDING THE LOVER WHO HAD EMBRACED HER

"Thou rogue! What hast thou gained by thy shameful conduct? I was sleeping in distress when thou didst come and suddenly embrace me. Mark the rouge of thy beloved's bosom and the dirty grease of her braids on my chest!"

176 THE FOLLY OF GODS

"On her full lips being kissed suddenly, she, holding a warning finger, her face lit with feigned anger, shouts: 'You brute! leave me alone!' Ah! he who has stealthily kissed a smiling maiden, and on her restless eyes narrowed while cooing, he alone has tasted nectar; the ocean was churned by the stupid gods for nothing." *(The reference is to the churning of the mythical milk ocean by the gods for ambrosia)*

17th Century A. D. Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay

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Under the chief courtesan was a rival courtesan drawing half her salary. The principal out-door duty of the courtesans of the palace was to add to the splendour of the court 'by holding the royal umbrella, golden pitcher and fan, and attending upon the king seated on his royal litter, throne or chariot'. From the age of eight a girl was expected to join the daily musical performance held in the palace before the king.

Ancient Hindus never accepted a universal standard of moral conduct but had always maintained that sexual morality like Dharma or religious duty depended mainly on birth, environments and caste. What was good for the Brahmin was not always good for the non-Brahmin, and the standards of Sudras were not applicable to the three higher castes. Again what was permissible for man was not always permissible for woman. For women of the three higher castes, namely Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaisya, to take to prostitution was a crime for which there was no penance. The women of these castes were bound by the strict rules embodied in the Dharma Sastras, and any deviation was taken a serious view of.

The courtesans in medieval India were drawn from the Sudras, and certain sub-castes had prostitution for their traditional occupation. As caste had been considered a divinely ordained institution which regulated not only one's social and moral conduct but also one's occupation, it was more or less the duty of women of these castes to practise the trade and their engaging themselves in any other occupation was considered a deviation from duty. The women of these castes were trained from early childhood in dancing, singing and other arts that please men. Exceptionally beautiful women with necessary accomplishments rose to the position of Ganikas (arch-courtesans) and were sought after by nobles, wealthy merchants and even by kings.

In the *Dasa Kumara Charita*, a Sanskrit classic by the well-known writer Dandin, there is an interesting moral situation in which a courtesan finds it difficult to distinguish right from wrong. Kamamanjari, so goes the story, the most accomplished courtesan in the city of Champa, capital of the kingdom of Anga, one day came to the sage Marichi, of high ascetic virtue, and begged of him to take her as his disciple. She found her life of pleasure, she told the sage, most improper and wished to lead a life of renunciation. While she was still imploring the sage to accept her, her relatives headed by her mother came to the sage and recounted to him the misery the silly girl had brought upon them by her deviation from the path of her Dharma or duty. The mother complained to him that the girl even got angry with her for bringing her up to follow the traditional occupation of the caste, the pursuit of which was her highest Dharma. She lamented thus : Obvious duty is as follows for the mother of a *fille de joie :* Care of her daughter's person from the hour of birth ; nourishment by a diet so regulated as to develop stateliness, vigour, complexion, intelligence, while harmonizing the humours gastric calefaction, and secretions ; not permitting her to see too much even of her father after the fifth year ; festive ritual on birthdays and holy days ; instruction in the art of flirtation, both major and minor ; thorough training in dance, song, instrumental music, acting, painting; also judgment of foods, perfumes, flowers, not forgetting writing and graceful speech ; a conversational acquaintance with grammar, with logical inference and conclusion ; profound skill in money-making, sport, and betting on cock fights and chess ; assiduous use of go-betweens in the passages of coquetry; display of numerous well-dressed attendants at religious or secular celebrations; careful selection of teachers to insure success at unpremeditated vocal and other exhibitions ; advertising on a national scale by a staff of trained specialists ; publicity for beauty-marks through astrologers and the like ; eulogistic mention in gatherings of men about town of her beauty, character, accomplishments, charm, and sweetness by hangers-on, gay dogs, buffoons, female religionists and others ; raising her price considerably when she has become an object of desire to young gentlemen ; surrender to a lover of independent fortune, a phylogynist or one intoxicated by seeing her charms, a gentleman eminent

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for rank, figure, youth, money, vigour, purity, generosity, cleverness, gallantry, art, character and sweetness of disposition ; delivery, with gracious exaggeration of value received, to one less affluent, but highly virtuous and cultivated (the alternative is levying on his natural guardians, after informal union with such a gentleman) ; collection of bad debts by vamping judge and jury ; mothering lover's daughter ; abstraction, by ingenious tricks, of money left in an admirer's possession after payment for periodical pleasures ; steady quarrelling with a defaulter or miser ; stimulation of the spirit of generosity in an overthrifty adorer by the incentive of jealousy ; repulse of the impecunious by biting speeches, by public taunts, by cutting his daughters, and by other embarassing habits, as well as by simple contempt ; continued clinging to the openhanded, the chivalrous, the blameless, the wealthy with full consideration of the inter-related chances of money and misery.

"Besides, a courtesan should show readiness indeed, but no devotion to a lover ; and even if fond of him, she should not disobey mother or grandmother.—In spite of all this, the girl disregards her God-given vocation and has spent a whole month of amusement—at her own expense !—with a Brahmin youth, a fellow from nowhere whose face is his fortune. Her snippiness has offended several perfectly solvent admirers and has pauperised her own family. And when I scolded her : 'This is no kind of a scheme. This isn't pretty,' she was angry and took to the woods. And if she is obstinate, this whole family will stay right here and starve to death. There is nothing else to do." *

The mother in her distress fell at the sage's feet and wept. The sage concurred with the view of the mother and observed that the best means of salvation for each caste was to perform the prescribed duties and follow the traditional occupation. Since a courtesan's duty was to trade in pleasure, the holy man admonished Kamamanjari to give up all ambitions of short cut to salvation through renunciation, and asked her to go with her mother and religiously practise her trade. Kamamanjari would not, however, be persuaded and Marichi reluctantly accepted her as a disciple and asked her mother to go home and call after a few days.†

Ancient Hindu writers were well acquainted with the ways of the courtesan. Says Bhartrihari :

A heart morose ; a face lit up with pride,
A nature intricate as mountain pass ;
A mind as fickle as dew on tumbling grass ;
A vanity the peacock never vied ;
A succubus that mimes the gentle bride ;
That loves not what man is but what he has ;
That dessicates, yet will not be denied.
Such is the ageless, changeless courtesan,
The woman glancing through her half-closed eyes,
Who wisps men's veins with passion like a flail.

---

* Tr. Arthur W. Ryder.

† It will be of interest to know that the whole thing was a hoax. The story of the quarrel between the mother and the daughter is a faked one. The real intention of Kamamanjari in becoming the disciple of Marichi was to seduce him in order to win a wager. In an argument between Kamamanjari and a rival courtesan the latter taunted her with the remark that she was 'talking as if she had seduced Marichi'. Now Kamamanjari maintained that seducing the ascetic Marichi was not such an impossible task for her as her rival imagined, and temper rising high, the courtesans laid a wager by which Kamamanjari, if successful in seducing Marichi, was to have her rival as a slave ; failure to seduce the sage was to have enslaved Kamamanjari !

It may be mentioned that after working as the ascetic's disciple for some time Kamamanjari seduced the holy man, and the old dotard rode through the city streets with her and publicly announced his love for her before the king of Anga !

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I know her now, and yet—how weak is man !
She still allures me to her paradise
That leads to hell—but will she there avail ?

While Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra* deals with the subject in a purely scientific spirit, there are two well-known works on the courtesan's trade which are of a literary character. One is *Kuttanimatham* (Lessons of a Bawd) by Damodaragupta and the other *Samayamatrika* (Harlot's Breviary) of Kshemendra. The *Kuttanimatham* contains instructions for the probationer and is in the form of professisonal advice from an elder member to a novice. It is based on the *Kama Sutra*. The *Samayamatrika* is the biography of a courtesan, embodying her varied experience and adventures. Kshemendra was a versatile genius who wrote on several subjects and his style in *Samayamatrika* is marked by a cruel wit seldom found in Sanskrit literature.*

It is interesting to note that one of the most popular plays of ancient India, the *Mrichchakatika* (Clay Cart) had a courtesan for its heroine. It was written by the royal playwright Sudraka and depicts Indian life in the early centuries of the Christian Era. Unlike other Sanskrit works which mainly deal with the activities of gods, demons and kings, the *Mrichchakatika* deals with the life of ordinary citizens. The fact that a king who had no illusions about royalty wrote the play was probably responsible for this interesting deviation from convention.

The following two well-known stanzas about the courtesan are found in the *Mrichchakatika :*

In the same tank do bathe the learned as the fool,
The crow does bend a branch as does the peafowl,
All men do cross a stream in the selfsame boat ;
A courtesan, like the tank, the branch, the boat must serve all.

Ever the courtesan is the young man's companion,
Common to all as the wayside creeper ;
Your body a merchandise saleable for gold ;
Serve then the dear as well as the loathed.

Dattaka and following him Vatsyayana had made a thorough and scientific study of the ways of the courtesans.

Vatsyayana classified the courtesans of his time into nine :

(1) Kumbhadasi or common slave : Common harlots, cheap as Kumbhas or spittoons came under this class. They gave themselves up to all and sundry for a small fee and had neither beauty nor accomplishments.

(2) Paricharika or attendant : She was the virgin daughter or ward of an elderly courtesan 'married' to a man according to a special form of marriage prevalent in brothels. The Paricharika, after defloration by her husband, was allowed to practise as a free lance on the expiry of a stipulated period mentioned in the marriage contract, but was bound to 'attend' on her 'husband' in preference if he called.

(3) Kulata or secret prostitute : She was a married woman who secretly practised the trade for profit.

(4) Swairini or free woman : She too like No. 3, was a married woman but practised openly given freedom to do so by her husband.

* A summary of *Kuttanimatham* and *Samayamatrika* will be found in *Hindu Religion, Customs & Manners.*

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(5) Nati or actress : Dancers and actresses constituted the better class of common courtesan in medieval India. Their ostensible means of livelihood was acting or dancing, but they never refused a good offer for their favours.

(6) Silpakarika or the artisan's wife : Wives of artisans, usually drawn from the Sudra castes, worked in the households of higher castes. If not actually engaged on a whole time basis, they often visited these households for casual work, for collecting the wages due to their husbands, or for receiving gifts on festive occasions, and were easily led astray by designing male members of the household. In fact, women of the lower classes had always had an attraction for the men of the higher. Apart from the obvious pecuniary motive, a woman was usually flattered by the thought of getting a son by a man of a higher caste. Hence a man found it easy to seduce a woman below his social status, but extremely difficult to seduce a woman of a caste higher than his.

(7) Prakashavinashta or run-away wife : She was the wife of a respectably married man, who eloped with a paramour and lived with him as his concubine.

(8) Rupajibi or lovely body-seller : This courtesan was noted for her flawless bodily proportions and physical beauty.

(9) Ganika or super-courtesan : This was the highest type of heart-ravisher. She had a body as desirable as that of the Rupajibi, but in addition possessed several accomplishments which made her the gem of her class. She was well-versed in the sixty-four arts. Wise as a king's minister, she was sought after even by monarchs not only for pleasure but also for instruction. The fashionable competed among themselves for winning her favours, and poets wrote panegyrics about her accomplishments.

In the *Mahabharata* there is yet another classification of courtesans. According to this epic, courtesans were of five kinds :

(1) Rajavesya or royal courtesan who catered to the needs of kings.

(2) Nagari or city harlot who had her establishment in the city and whom fashionable citizens sought for pleasure.

(3) Guptavesya or secret harlot, who came of a good family and practised the trade secretly to avoid scandal.

(4) Devavesya or harlot of the gods, who was attached to some temple.

(5) Brahmavesya (Thirthaga) or harlot of the bathing places, who sought pilgrims who flocked to the sacred streams during seasons of pilgrimages.

Vatsyayana has allotted several chapters of the *Kama Sutra* to the art and wiles of the courtesan. His treatise is exhaustive and some portions are summarised below as a warning to men against falling into the snares of the courtesan.

The courtesans of his time were clever dissemblers. While selling pleasure for profit a courtesan pretended to be in genuine love with her victim. She knew that the feeling that a woman was yielding her person for mere money was likely to rob the lover of his pleasure, and hence cleverly pretended passionate attachment to him. She left money transactions to her mother ; if she had no mother, she engaged an elderly bawd to act as mother.

A successful courtesan employed agents and dependents who were able to gain access to fashionable society and contact rich men of the leisured classes. Some of the types of men whom a courtesan counted as possible victims were : A wealthy man not loyal to his wife ; a boastful dandy ; a handsome man, vain of his good looks ; an impotent nobleman who wished to be known as exceptionally virile ; a wealthy spendthrift ; a man without children

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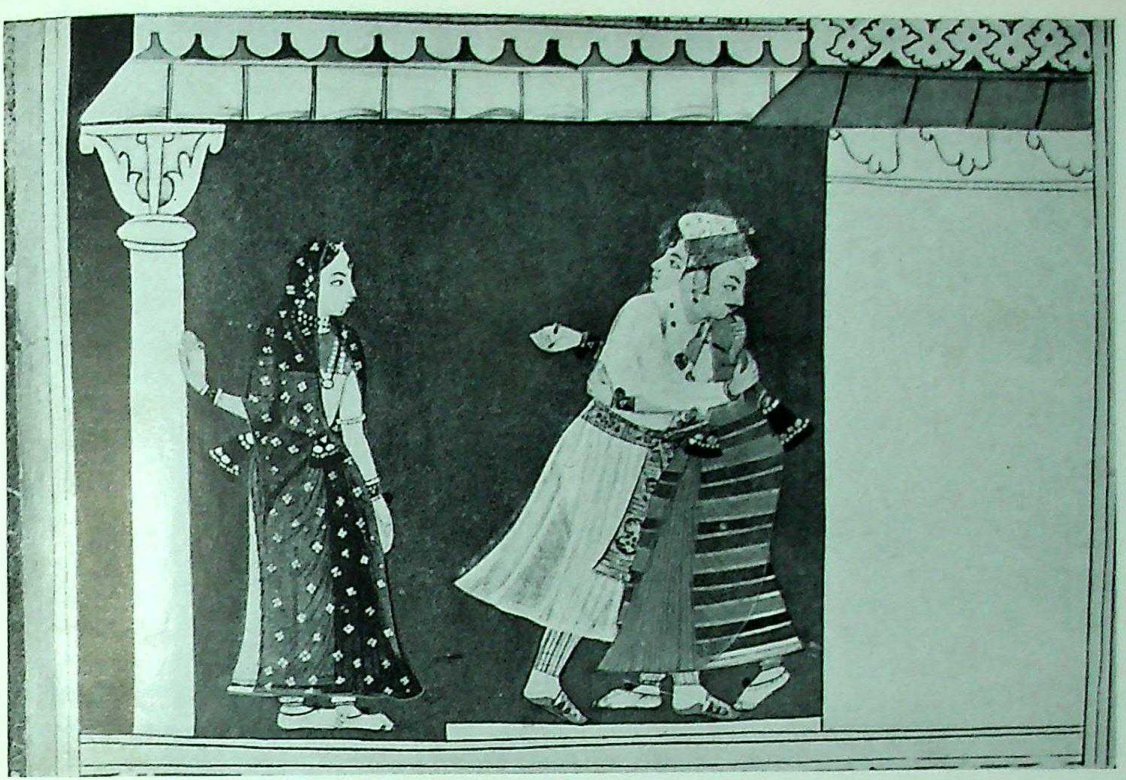
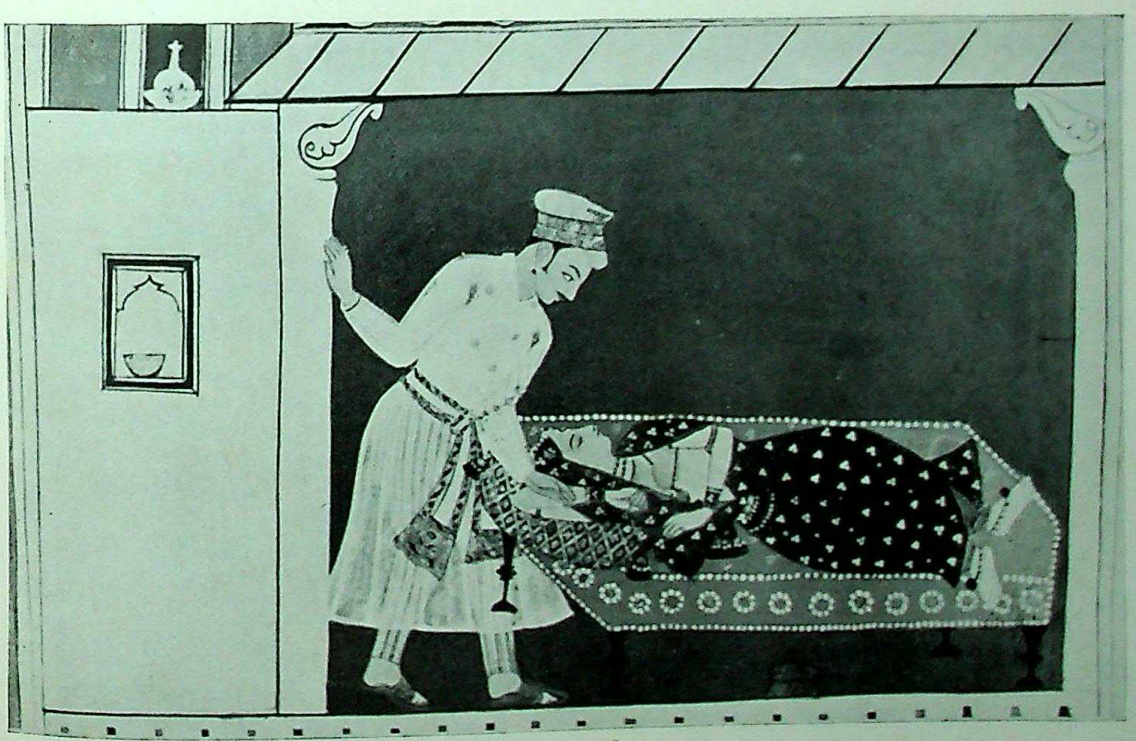


177 THE WARM EMBRACE

"Hearing the mere mention of his name, the hair bristled on my body; beholding his face, my body became the oozing moonstone. Ah! my lover has come to embrace me! The pressure on my bosom will abate my anger, will melt my heart."



178 RECONCILIATION

"Lying on her bed, half asleep, she heard the lover utter the name of her rival; in sheer disgust she turned her face away from him, heedless of his flattering words. The spurned lover pleaded passionately: 'Darling, pray, be not sad'. And he saw her face gently turning to his."

17th Century A. D. *Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay*

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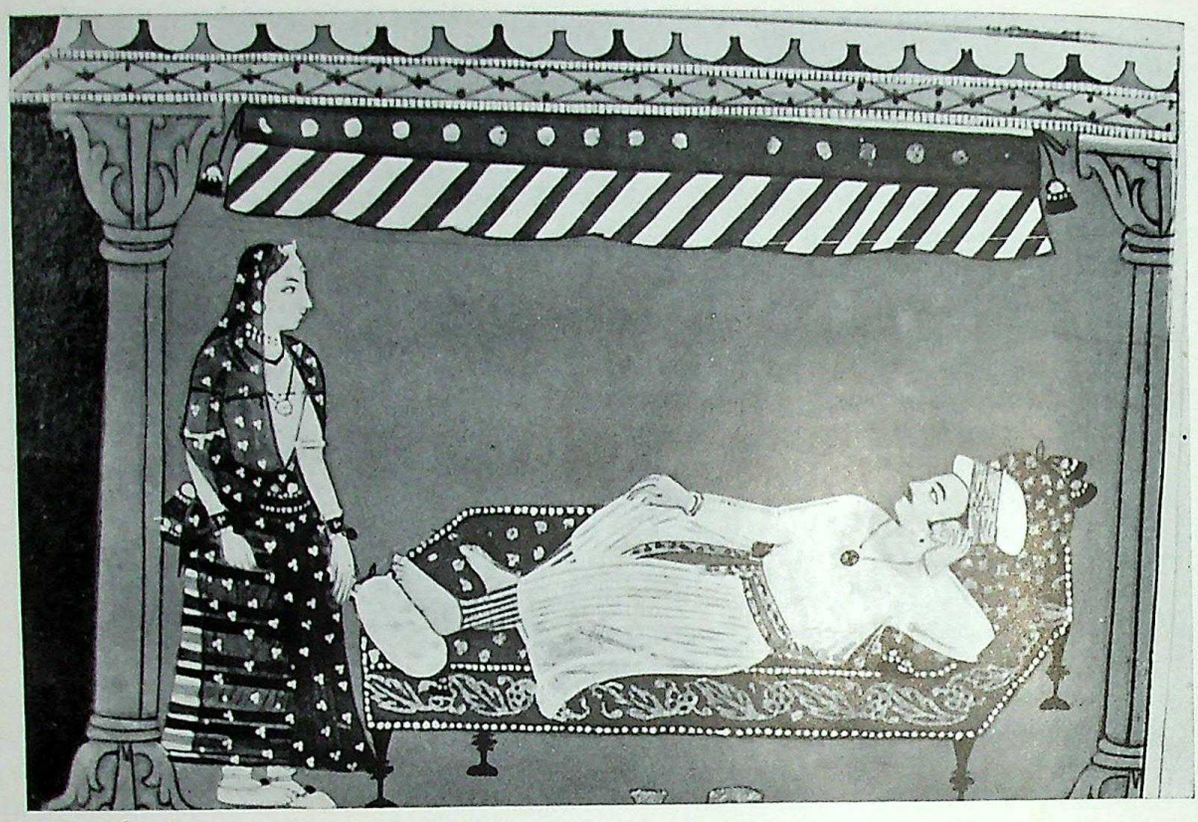
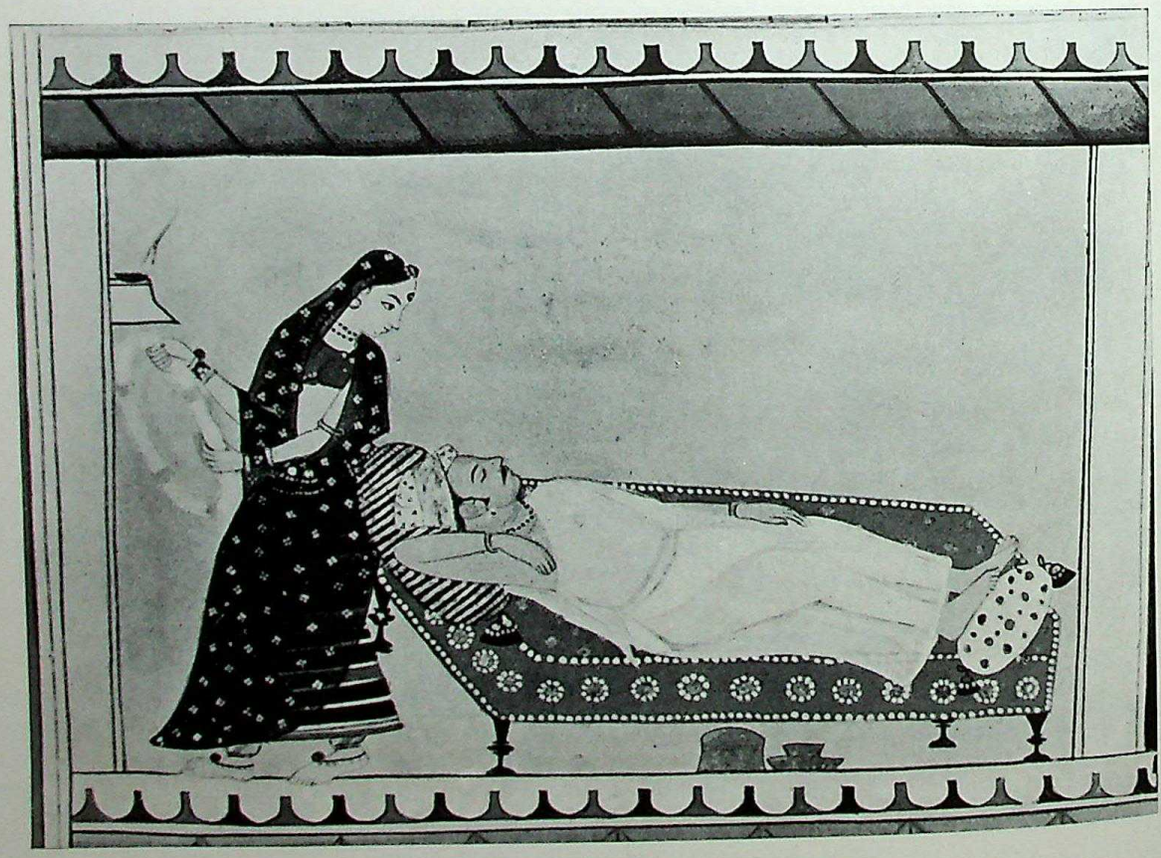


179 MEETING AFTER SEPARATION

"Withered, pale, weak, and troubled by pangs of separation and covered with dishevelled locks, her languid face on my return from the far off land shone forth in its natural splendour. Ah! The sweet, bold, flurried, heart-throbbing kisses I imprinted on my beloved, who can describe!"



180 THE MADNESS OF PASSION

"Am I the same woman? Are these the jingling anklets known to men? Yea, and yet why this madness in a woman like me whose natural wealth is modesty?"

17th Century A. D. *Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay*

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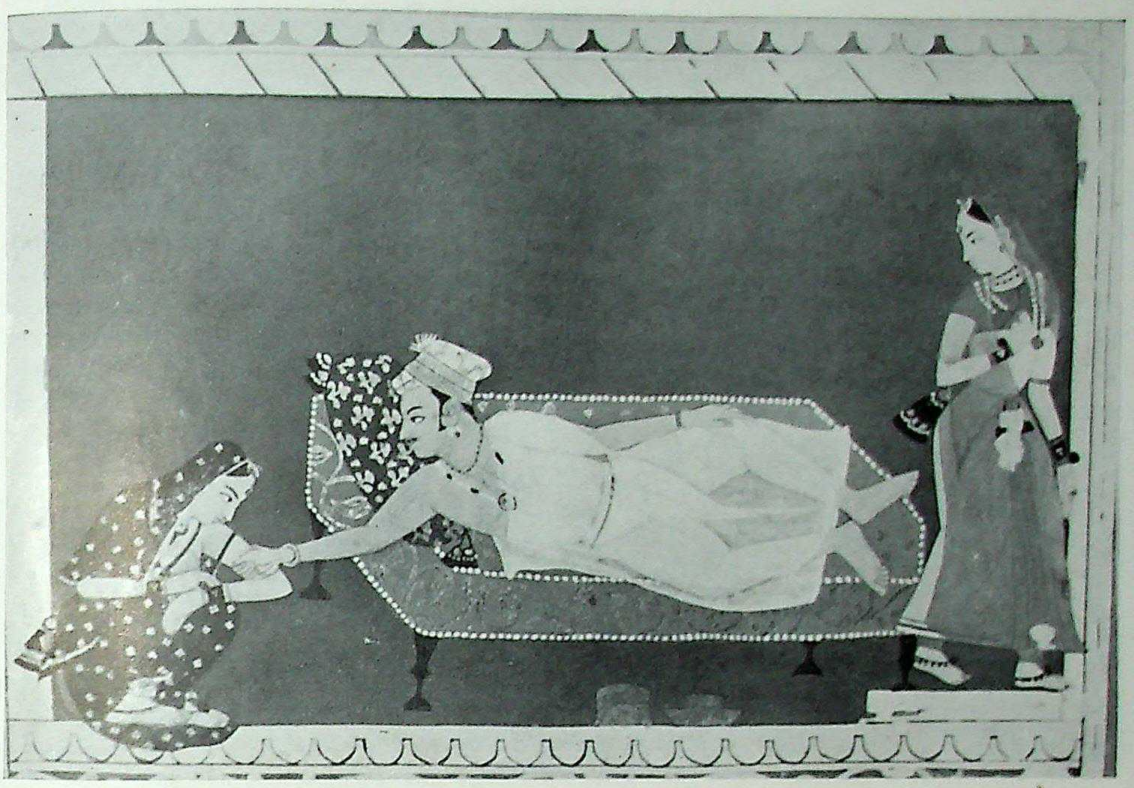
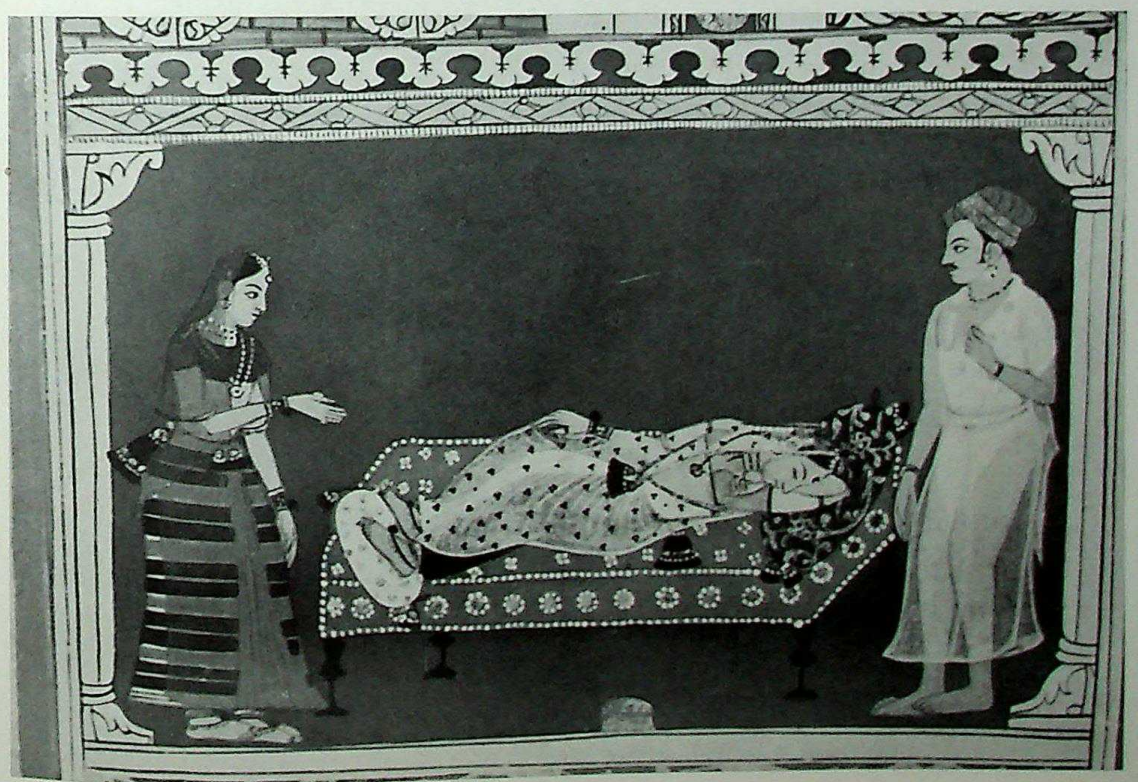


181 THE INEXPERIENCED BRIDE

"The bashful bride, on her husband clinging to her garments, looks down in confusion ; on his attempt to force an embrace, she trembles and gathers her limbs ; she looks to her maid for help but is struck dumb by the mischievous smile on her face. In this first dalliance in love, alas! the core of her heart emits sparks that consumes her with shame."



182 THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

"Why is this fair lady, the edge of her garment tied with her girdle, sleeping again ? Asked the lover gently of the silent attendant. The sleeping beauty cried fiercely : ' Oh ! Mother ! Can't a woman sleep in peace ? ' Eager to sleep she dismissed her attendant abruptly and took her lover to bed."

17th Century A. D. *Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay*

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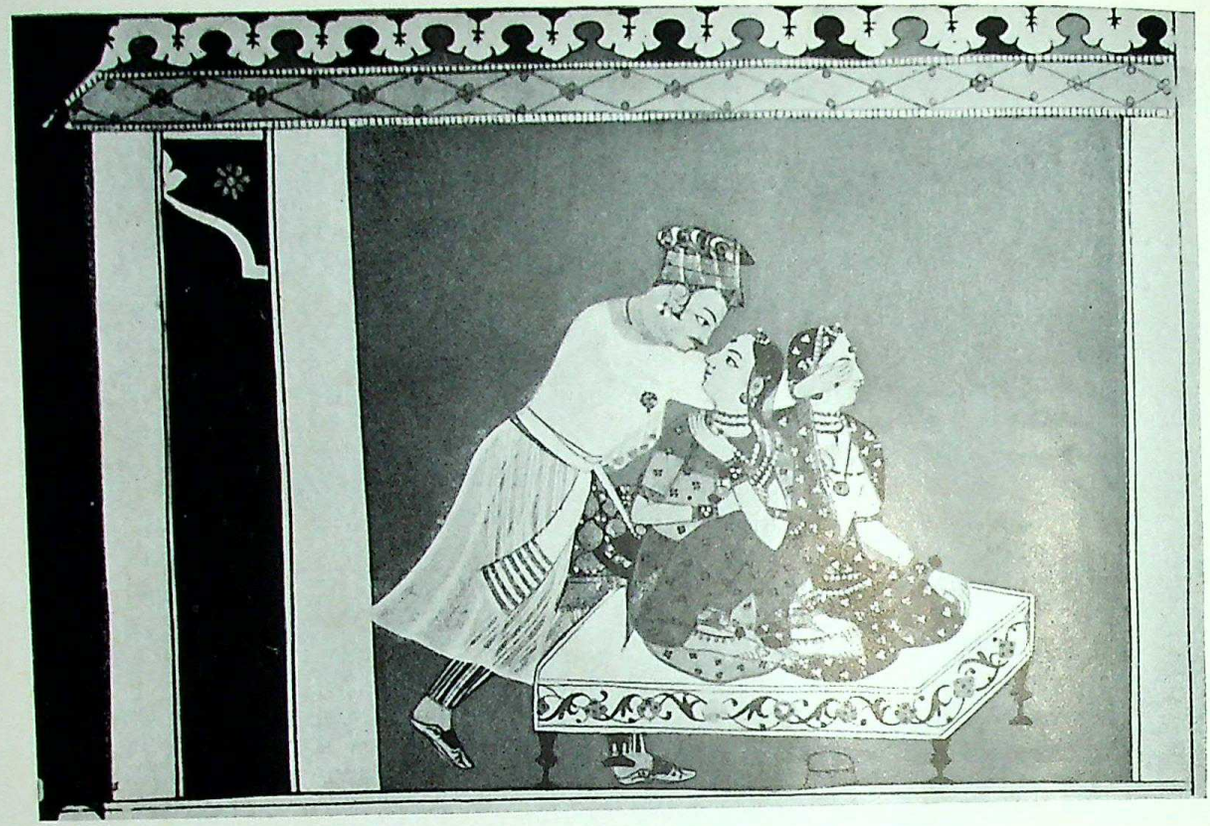
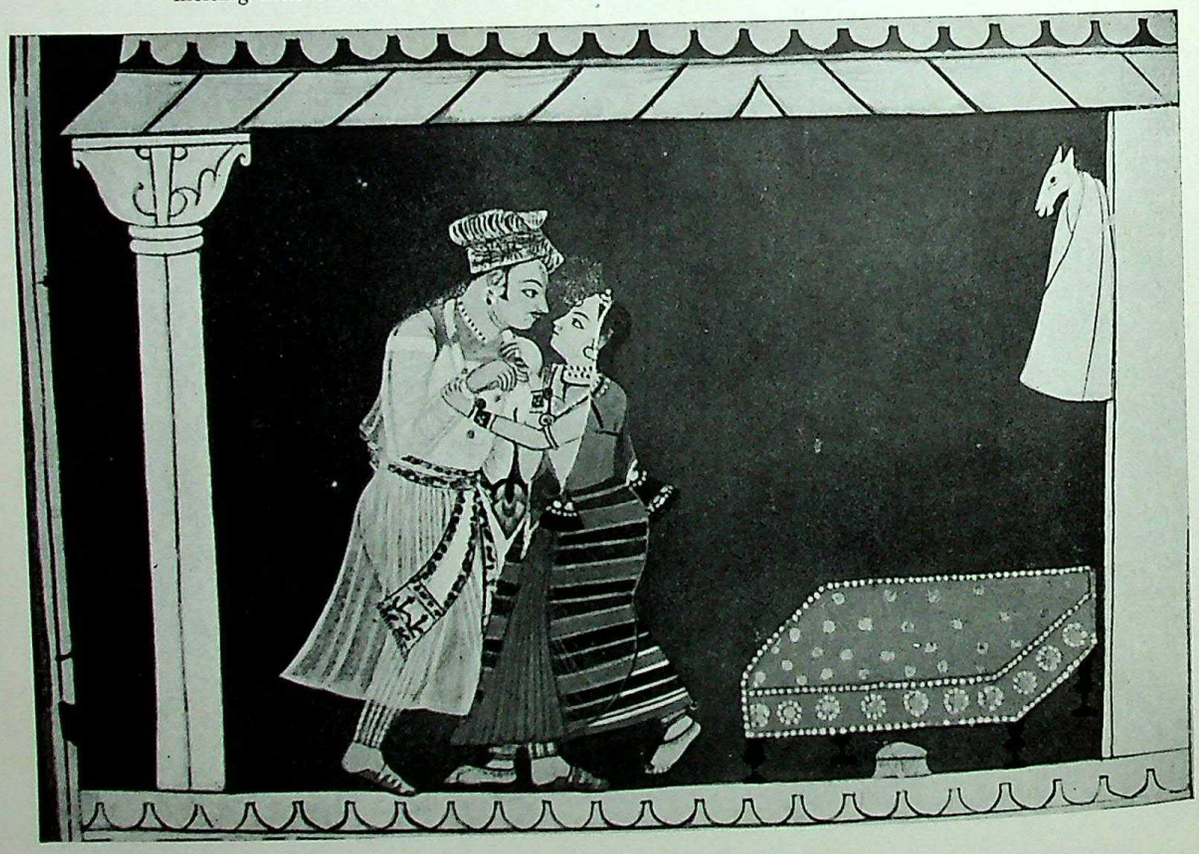


183 THE LOVER'S TRICK

"The roguish lover seeing his two loves seated on the same couch, came stealthily from behind, and gently closing the eyes of one and turning his shoulder slightly to a side, his hair bristling with joy, he kissed the other; her heart melting with love and the flow, choked at the cheeks, spread into a playful smile."



184 THE ROUGH KISS

"Drunk of the lotus of her rival's lips the lover posing as if the pollen had disturbed his eyesight closed his eyes in feigned distress; the fair maiden, full of anxiety, trembling, approached him gasping and he imprinted a rough kiss on her open lips."

17th Century A. D. *Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay*

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whose death was expectantly awaited by near relatives ; the only son of a wealthy man ; the head of a religious institution who was publicly celibate and secretly lascivious ; a youth contemptuous of his superiors ; and an independent young man possessing a large income.

These men were sought after for the sake of wealth only. But the acquisition and keeping of wealth needed the help of other men whose friendship a courtesan had to cultivate with no thought of receiving cash payment. A courtesan by the nature of her profession, made many enemies of whom the most potent were rivals in the profession and jealous lovers. Hence the careless and unwary courtesan not only ruined herself financially but even went in danger of her life, and hence she acquired the friendship of reliable and powerful men. Men of this category to whom a courtesan doled out her charms were well-placed officers of the state, and strong men of daring like distinguished soldiers or wrestlers.

As pimps, procurers and spies a courtesan employed a number of paid servants who were clever but needy, but these were not entertained as lovers. Suitable persons of this type who were employed on a part time or whole time basis were : Petty police officers, clerks in law courts, astrologers, jesters, florists, perfumers, barmen, mendicants, barbers, paupers who came of good family and had, as such, contact with the higher classes, and professors and teachers of fine arts to whom young men of the aristocracy went for instruction. The duty of these agents was to procure for their mistress suitable lovers. It was bad business for a courtesan to openly offer herself for sale ; the buyer was always made to seek her. It was here that agents helped. By enumerating her accomplishments with necessary exaggerations but without in any way giving the impression that they were advertising their mistress, her agents gave the courtesan countrywide publicity. They were ever on the look out for desirable customers and as soon as one showed interest in her, they faithfully reported to her his qualifications, his tastes, and, above all, financial position.

Apart from professional activities, a courtesan had her own life to live. Being a woman, it was in her nature to love some man for the sake of love only, and in response to this emotional side of her life she at times entertained a lover without any pecuniary motive. Blind love in this matter was however, avoided. The candidate selected for the favour was a cultured man of her own position. A handsome young man of noble birth was usually preferred ; he had a thorough knowledge of literature and fine arts, and was able to discuss the comparative merits of works of art and of poetry ; he was courteous, of easy manners, a good conversationalist, a student of comparative religion, fond of social gatherings, picnics, drinking parties, festivities, sports and theatricals. While showing no objection to drinking and even taking pleasure in it, he was not a habitual drunkard. He was never argumentative, for arguments lead to blows. He was a good mixer and was free, for obvious reasons, from jealousy and suspicion. If, in spite of all these accomplishments, the favourite was inclined to give trouble, he was thrown out without the least hesitation ; for the main object of life of a courtesan was the acquisition of wealth and fame, and her own personal predilictions were not allowed to stand in the way of this all-important duty.

Apart from these desirable lovers, a courtesan at times yielded herself to an undesirable in exceptional circumstances. For the sake of saving her life or avoiding injury to her person, she gave in to the advances of a desperate man ; for purposes of revenge a courtesan at times yielded to a man if, by so doing, the man could be induced to injure her enemy ; a courtesan usually kept herself in constant training, and as a sort of exercise at times consorted with virile men whom she probably did not like ; if a pious but impecunious Brahmin begged of her for her favours, a courtesan aspiring for religious merit acceded to his request as an act of charity ; compassion for a poor man hopelessly in love with her also moved a kind hearted courtesan to bestow her favours upon him ; to oblige a friend a courtesan at his request, at times slept with another man ; and lastly, if a courtesan was

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taken by the bearing of a virile looking man or had heard of the extraordinary virility of a reputedly libidinous man, she, out of curiosity to find out the truth about him, gave herself up to him free of fees.

After having found a client on whom she could depend for a semi-permanent attachment, a courtesan usually ascertained through her spies his tastes and financial position. If he was a man worth her troubles, she did, on his first visit, receive him with the greatest deference and entertained him. For his pleasure she selected the amusements he loved most. Quail fights, cock fights and ram fights were held if he was interested in any of these; theatricals or musical concerts were organized if he was fond of such performances. Young maid servants attended upon him, and he was regaled with sweet, intoxicating beaverages. The courtesan sat by his side and worked him up by her blandishments to an erotic pitch, but at the same time played the shy maiden, lest officious or bold conduct should give herself away; moreover, she knew well that men in love did not appreciate what was easily obtained. Suggestive hints were made by the courtesan's attendants, at which she behaved like a revolted maiden.

When, however, the demand from the lover became urgent, the courtesan decided to yield herself to him; upon this, she with due coyness, conducted him to her well-decorated private chamber. Here she was at liberty to fall on his chest in a paroxysm of passion and tell him, weeping, that she had never loved so worthy a man; that his conversation was enchanting that his humour was without parallel. This was easily believed in, if well presented and driven home with caresses, kisses and a show of abandon in imitation of a young maiden in deep love alone with her lover in a secluded spot. For most men, she knew, have a high opinion of themselves, and every fool is apt to imagine that there is something peculiarly attractive in him which makes women fall for him.

After the initial protests of passion, the courtesan took her lover to bed and showed him her mastery of the art of love. A woman well versed in the eighty-four postures was able to give her lover pleasures he had never known before. All the same the wily courtesan was careful not to boast of her knowledge of the art of love; on the other hand, she took care to tell him that she had learnt more in that one hour from him than in all her life and that she had never met so great a master of the art of love. During sexual congress she took care to note what pleased him most and confided to him what she desired most. When, after coitus, lassitude overtook him she gazed lovingly into his eyes. When he fell half asleep she kissed and embraced him passionately as if giving expression to intense love, and made sure that he was wakeful enough to notice her activities.

After such a night the lover was likely to be a regular visitor to her establishment. If he was a wealthy person able to keep her in affluence, she took care not to entertain other lovers in his presence. Minor lovers who recognized his relationship with her were, however, entertained secretly and dismissed when he was expected.

After establishing initial relations with a desirable lover, the next step was to hold him. With this object in view the courtesan showed him a devotion staunch as a wedded wife's. In his presence she would appear cheerful and confiding. When he was expected she would stand at the doorway and wait for his arrival anxiously, and when he came welcomed him with the sweetest of smiles. If he showed absentmindedness during conversation, she expressed concern for his worries and requested him to allow her to share his sorrows and troubles. She applauded his tastes, abhored what he disliked, appeared cheerful when he looked pleased and worried when he was unhappy. She would feign displeasure and make a show of jealousy if she beheld any tooth or nail marks on his body inflicted by his wife or some other lady. In his company she would show the utmost attention to what he said. While readily agreeing to all his views, if he mentioned anything about his

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wife or any other woman with anything approaching affection, she evinced displeasure as if unable to bear the very mention of a rival. When the lover sighed or sneezed or coughed she loudly prayed for his longevity.* In the presence of her lover, no other person was praised ; nor was mention made of a physical defect on any person which could apply to the lover. While sleeping with him she expressed her love for him as if talking in sleep. Due to bereavement if the lover was unhappy, she went into mourning. If he fell ill, she fasted for his recovery and gave generously to Brahmins and deities for his quick recovery. In case of financial loss and consequent worry for the lover, the courtesan expressed deep concern for his loss and even made a pretext of offering her own wealth to save him the worry. When the lover left her house, she came out upto the gate and stood there mournfully looking at the retreating figure ; if he happened to look back and see her, she feigned shyness and confusion as if surprised in the act of giving secret expression to her longing to behold him as long as she could. If, before going on a long journey he came to take leave of her, she told him that life was not worth living without him and expressed extreme unhappiness ; she even mentioned how she longed to have a son by him so that she could derive some comfort by seeing the boy when the father was away.

In short a courtesan who desired to have a thorough hold on her lover excelled the most devoted wife in her show of fidelity.

So much for winning and holding a lover. This was not however the real end of a courtesan's profession but the means to the real end which was profit. It was the handling of this branch of the trade that called for the greatest cunning. An open demand for cash as the price of her favours was not at all conducive to the cultivation of good relationship, but was liable to give herself away in spite of the most careful plans to play the devoted wife. Herein came the important role of the mother of the courtesan.

The mother was placed in an ideal position to demand money from the lover. She could tell her daughter openly and in front of the lover that she was like a fool, giving herself away to the man out of sheer infatuation when a dozen wealthier men were seeking her, each offering ten times the price he was able to pay. The courtesan played her part well, and appeared, on hearing this, torn between her own predilictions and duty towards the mother. Such behaviour was likely to make the lover pay the mother lavishly for saving his beloved from distress. The mother always and invariably showed displeasure at her daughter's deep attachment to the lover and dissuaded her, in his presence, from going out with him ; the daughter with equal obstinacy, defended the lover and went out with him. During these arguments she even threatened to commit suicide and cursed her fate for being placed under such an avaricious woman and in a profession which compelled her to seek filthy lucre in preference to personal attachments. Nevertheless she always acted in strict conformity with the secret instructions she had received from her mother and on occasions, even refused to go out with him under pretext of obeying the mother's imperative orders and thus made the lover pay heavier when he appeared next.

At times the courtesan herself got a good deal of money direct from the lover without appearing to compel payment. Dealers in jewellery were secretly instructed to call at her establishment with their wares when the lover was in the house, and while examining the jewels she expressed a desire to posssess some of them but pretended that she was short of cash. She would ask the jeweller for credit, which of course would be refused ; and it was a mean lover indeed who let a golden opportunity for showing liberality slip. Imaginary debtors at times presented fictitious bills to the courtesan, and on her expressing inablility to pay at the moment were permitted to assume an agressive attitude in presence of the lover. Further, they threw in a word or two to show that the debts were contracted because of her arranging lavish entertainments for the lover.

* Sighing, yawning, sneezing and coughing are believed to be the work of evil spirits who try to shorten men's lives.

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In addition to these subtle methods of compulsion from outside, the courtesan herself at times threw in some hints which the lover in decency could not ignore. She would for instance, tell him that she could not attend an important function in a friend's house as she had not got enough money to buy a suitable present. She would fake up a theft in the house and express distress at the misfortune which compelled her to appear before her lover without any jewellery on her person. She could also complain of her mother's extravagance and mismanagement, the high cost of living and the low income, and the impatience of creditors. The infatuated voluptuary on hearing these sad stories was bound to relieve her of her distress ; if he was mean enough not to be moved, she could plainly tell him that she was on the verge of ruin and he alone could save her.

There was a very subtle way by which a courtesan got money out of a lover. She acted at times as propagandist for physicians, artists, sculptors and architects, and made her lover engage them on important work and levied a commission on profits without the lover knowing anything about it. A courtesan constantly dinned into her lover's ears the exalted position of her rivals and of their lovers who kept them in luxury. If all these subtle methods failed, there was a last resort which ensured extortion from the most parsimonious lover. The courtesan would arrange with a person to bring a fictitious attachment on her property, and lay hold of her possessions and the jewellery on the person of the lover. A lover who lost his ornaments in this fashion never dared to go to law for shame.

These were methods used when a courtesan thought that some sort of a semi-permanent attachment to a wealthy man of fashion was likely to yield more profit than free lance work. In certain places and seasons, free lance work was more profitable and in such cases she did not attach herself to a particular individual. In great cities, for instance, where foreign merchants and diplomats resided the better class of courtesans were in great demand and they put up their charms for auction. Lesser courtesans also followed this line of action when the demand was greater than the supply. After a singing performance or a dance in the establishment of a courtesan in which her performance was well applauded by a large audience, it was sound business for the mother of a courtesan to put up the dancer for auction and accept the highest bidder as the guest of the night. The competitive spirit, the courtesan knew, if well fostered among the guests especially after they were well drunk, was likely to bring in fabulous sums for a single night.

It is interesting to observe that the writers on the profession maintained that in no other trade did the time factor count for so much as in this business. A time invariably came when the most desirable lover had to be driven out ; may be, all that could be got had been sequeezed out of him ; may be, he had grown agressively jealous and overbearing or he was financially ruined in some crisis thus becoming useless for the purpose of the courtesan. It was then time to break off relations with him and strike up new friendship.

In certain cases loss of fortune or long familiarity had its effect on the lover and a growing indifference probably led to a lover's final departure without any unpleasantness. But all men were not sensible in love ; some fools, heedless of the fact that without a running income the most beautiful courtesan would soon be reduced to the position of a beggar woman, clung on to her like leeches even after they had become paupers. It was then necessary for courtesans to get rid of them.

Lovers were not antagonized by rude behaviour if subtle methods could be effective. Coldness or indifference on the part of a courtesan could give the necessary hint to a sensitive man to break off. If the lover was inclined to take no notice of such behaviour, more obvious methods were employed. The courtesan would, for instance, talk at length with others in his presence on subjects of which he had no knowledge, and when he blurted out something out of tune exposed his ignorance. When she wished to seek advice, she

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185 BROACHING THE SUBJECT

186 THE SURPRISE

187 SHE IS WILLING
Provincial Museum, Orissa

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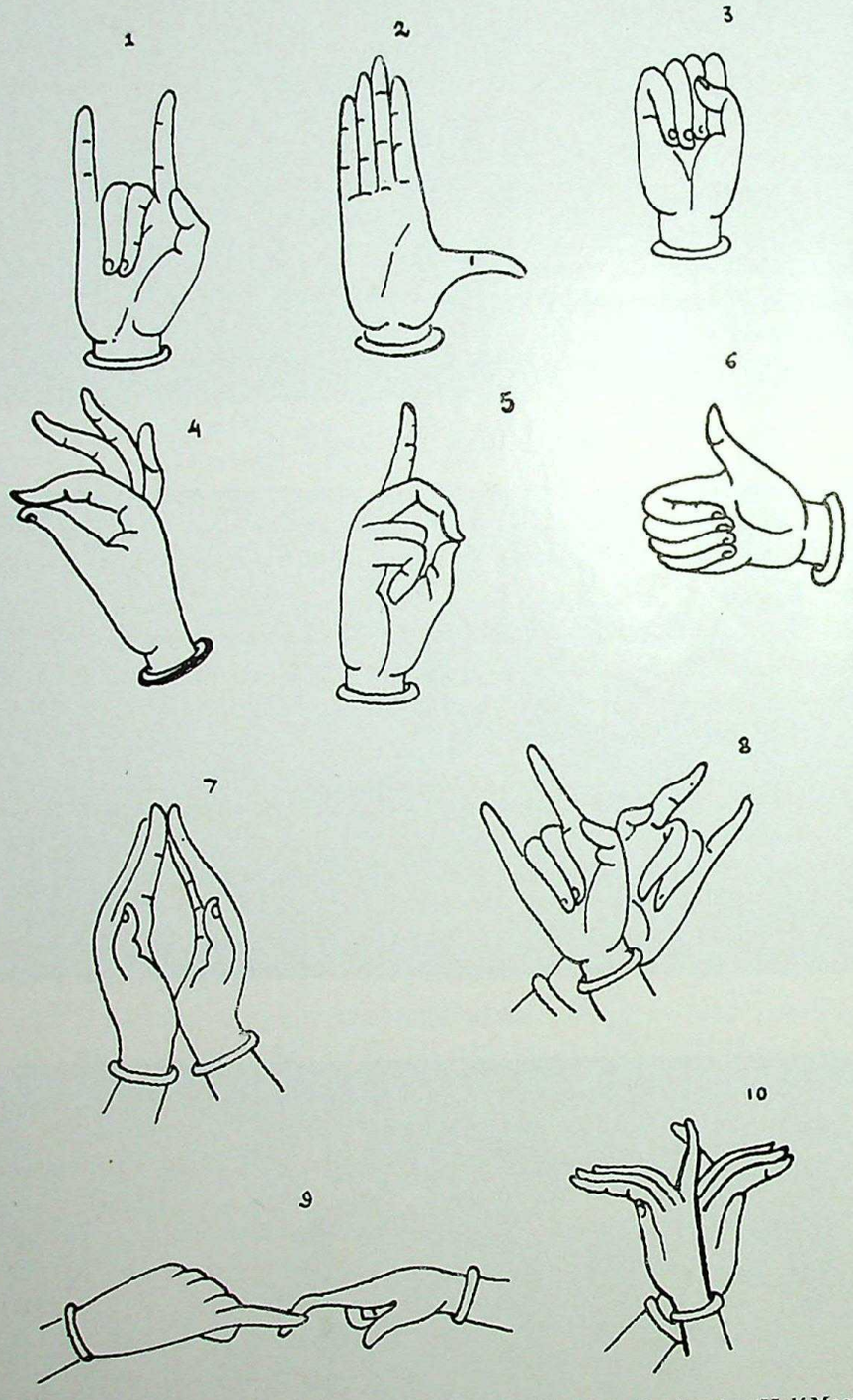
188 SOME SIGNS OF THE HAND USED BY LOVERS AND DANCERS TO SIGNIFY CERTAIN EMOTIONS OR CONVEY SECRET MESSAGES



(1) Kantramukha (Scissors) denotes separation, death (2) Ardhachandra (Half Moon), meditation, religious vows, etc. (3) Mushti (Fist), determination (4) Hamsaya (Swan's Head), joy (5) Soochi (Needle), concentration (6) Sikhara (Peak) rejection (7) Kapota (Pigeon), respect (8) Katakavardhana (Bracelets), a proposal (9) Pasa (Noose), trouble (10) Kilaka (Wedge), love

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189 DANCE

190 TOILET

Vellore Temple : 17th Century A. D.

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191 DRINKING LOVERS

Medallion, Badami Cave, Bijapur : 7th Century A. D.

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192 DEVOTEES WORSHIPPING A LINGAM

On north frieze banding the sanctum. Kandariya Mahadeva Temple, Khajuraho

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consulted others in his presence and followed their advice even if he volunteered his to pursue a different course of action. She openly praised his enemies and spoke ill of his friends. If he sought her in private, she refused to oblige him ; if invited to his house, she could send a messenger to openly demand, in presence of his guests, an exorbitant sum which he possibly could not produce. When he was expected in her house, she would go out leaving word that she was gone to visit a lover preferably an enemy of his. In the company of other men she would laugh in derision when he made a serious observation and assume a serious expression when he told clever jokes.

When by any mischance she had to go to bed with him, she would close her lips when he tried to kiss her. Any attempt to make nail or teeth marks on her body were rudely objected to. If he tried to force her she locked her arms to prevent an embrace. When he was exhausted, she would invite him for sexual congress and if he was unable to satisfy her, question his claim to manhood.

If even these open methods failed to bring about the eviction of the unwanted lover, a courtesan requistioned the help of servants. When she pretended anger at his words or behaviour she struck her servants in his presence, which was, according to accepted conventions of insolent behaviour, as good as a slap on his own face. She would instruct the servants to speak and behave rudely to him. If even these did not avail, she plainly told him that he was an unwanted person and should clear out of the house. If the infatuated voluptuary still persisted in staying, the servants were asked to remove him by force.

In her studied misbehaviour designed to eject a lover, the courtesan often counted on a chance that at a future date he was likely to be entertained again. He might improve his financial position by some bold move and be again in a position to keep her in affluence. A clever man might find favour with the king and the ruler might pay off his debts and bestow upon him endowments that would make him the wealthiest man in the city. An heir to a desirable fortune thrown out of his house for extravagance or association with bad characters might, by the death of his father or near relative, come by vast wealth. It is because of this possible turns of fortune that a courtesan tried to avoid, if possible, irrepairable and rash methods of getting rid of an impoverished lover.

Vatsyayana has a chapter in the *Kama Sutra* devoted to the art of repairing broken relations with a lover.

In the case of a lover who had, of his own accord, broken off relations, the courtesan waited for the initiative to come from him. If, after attaching himself to another courtesan, he had left her and again sought his former love as a whim, he was made to pay excessively before being taken back into favour. If, however, he had not actually left the second courtesan but was trying to contact his former love with a view to reconciliation, she first ascertained the true nature of his intentions. If she was convinced that he was sincere, he was taken back. But rival courtesans were always treated with suspicion and men under their influence with the greatest caution. At times courtesans used their lovers to make fools of their rivals ; if such was found the intention of the lover making the advances, he was not only rejected but humiliated.

Rejected lovers often proved malicious and spiteful and a courtesan exercised the greatest caution in dealing with them. While some men nursed grievances and constantly sought opportunities for revenge, there were others of a softer nature who readily forgot the past in the joy of the present. In all cases, a wary courtesan left the initiative to come from the lover himself. If a courtesan kept up her fame and was known as the most fashionable in the city or even as one of the most desirable, men of fashion had, of necessity to seek her, as association with her was likely to enhance their reputation. So a rejected

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lover when he regained his wealth, at times went back to the old flame with an added zest and a sense of having regained some precious possession lost through folly or misfortune. Such men were accepted if they were able to pay their way up.

There were certain conditions under which a courtesan took the initiative herself in repairing broken relations. A rejected lover who had risen to fame and wealth or to an extraordinarily exalted position in the state by the king's favour was contacted by the courtesan herself. Again, if a courtesan was convinced that a rival was responsible for his parsimony and consequent strained relations, she went out of her way, for revenge, to take the initiative and humiliate the rival.

In making advances to a rejected lover, the mother of the courtesan was often made a convenient scapegoat of. The courtesan would send word to her lover that the avarice of the crafty old woman was responsible for her foolish conduct towards him. She would tell him that if he would be so kind as to forget the past and take her under his patronage, she would kick the old woman out of the house, and would even do so by arrangement with the woman herself. Worries due to financial troubles were also advanced as excuses for past misconduct, and she even showed repentance and put forward an unconditional apology. Stories of secret sciences employed by a rival courtesan or a jealous admirer were also used to give conviction to a superstitious lover, and secret agents were paid to drop in hints to others in his presence corroborating these statements.

When, by such methods, conviction of the innocence of the courtesan was forced on the lover, he was likely to come back to her ; and if and when he did, he was received with a show of rejoicing, and the occasion was celebrated in a befitting fashion.

All things, however, must end, and the beauty of a courtesan, alas ! is no exception to this rule. A time came when the most skilful art would fail to bring any lovers to the ageing courtesan. Time, that cruel destroyer of youth and beauty, would eventually lay low the proudest Ganika ; and happy the courtesan who had earned enough in her youth and saved something for the rainy day. An old courtesan was not, however, entirely without any source of income. If she had daughters of her own or adopted ones who were young and attractive, she managed the establishment for them and instructed the young courtesans in the art and craft of love. A courtesan who, in her youth, had squandered away her money usually made a living by working as bawd or 'mother' to earning members of the profession.

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PART FOUR

EROTIC ELEMENT IN RELIGION

Chapter Fourteen

LINGAM AND THE FAMILY OF SHIVA

To the Westerner brought up in the Christian tradition, sex and religion may appear opposites, the one definitely spiritual and the other material. Dominated by St. Paul's views and the ascetic tendencies of the medieval Church, Christanity considers sex as something unspeakable and Christians are inclined to view sex-worship as a Pagan evil that existed in Babylon, Syria, pre-Christian Rome and Greece, and may be shocked to learn that it is prevalent in modern India among civilized peoples. This feeling of outraged decency will be less acute if the reader takes some pains to understand Hinduism and view its ideals and practices in their correct perspective.

Hinduism is not a religion like Christianity or Islam with set dogmas. It will be more correct to conceive it as a civilisation or a culture. Just as European civilisation has grown out of the teachings of the philosophers and thinkers of ancient Rome and Greece, of St. Paul, the Fathers of the Church, Luther, Calvin, Voltaire and Roussou, Francis Bacon, Carlyle, Herbert Spencer, Hume, Fitchte, Kant, Nietche, Freud, Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Bertrand Russel and a host of other sages, Hinduism is a growth of ideas and beliefs which, while differing widely, have sufficient fundamental unity to be known as a single culture. Among orthodox Hindus may be found people who, in beliefs and practices, are poles apart : Men and women who hold the view that God is one or gods are many ; that there is no God or that there is nothing but God ; that there is an after-life or that there is none ; that caste is divinely ordained or that caste is man-made. There is no need to multiply instances ; suffice to say that there are not many beliefs in Hinduism which are not contradicted by Hindus themselves.

The higher Hindu conception of God, however, is monistic. This implies a certain freedom from ethical bonds. There is no sharp distinction between good and evil among the Hindus ; the distinction between good and evil is a social convenience, useful only to the partially enlightened. The fully enlightened is above good and evil. He maintains that the universe must be accepted as it is and it is impertinent to attribute responsibility for the existence of what a man's ignorant mind conceives as good to God and the rest to the devil. The devil exists only in the imagination of the ignorant. The universe is what it is ; it is neither good nor evil. The sailor on the high seas may, on a fine morning, find a favourable breeze and be inclined to believe that the sea and the air were created for his benefit by a benevolent deity ; the evening may usher in a storm when the same sailor will feel like attributing the origin of the sea and the atmosphere to the devil. The Hindu philosopher takes the sea as it is ; he worships the smiling wavelets rippling by the zephyr and the raging waves in the storm with equal respect. He considers the separation of the sea as calm or stormy as essentially sentimental and arising out of fear or ignorance.

Again, the Hindu philosopher maintains that all phenomena are emanations of the Supreme Being and as such worthy of worship. If the terrors of Nature such as storms, lightning, thunder, earthquakes, epidemics and cataclysms fascinate a man, he is free to worship them, just as another man is at liberty to worship the sun or the moon for the benevolent light they shed. Courtesans as we have seen, are not excluded from the benefits of religion in India ; in Kama they have a god after their own heart. The religious instinct being universal, the Hindu maintains that every person must, to give full expression to his emotional life, have a deity or principle to worship. Robbers and free-booters, for instance, have their own deities ; the war-god Kartikeya is the god of thieves and he is said to

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have written a treatise on how to commit successful robbery. It may be mentioned that in making the war-god the patron saint of robbers also, the Hindus show much wisdom. The Thugs of medieval India were religious men who devotedly worshipped Bhavani for success in their murderous expeditions.

It is not surprising then that sex-worship has a place in the comprehensive synthesis of Hinduism.

It does not require mystic insight to realize the importance of sex in life. Any one can see that sex sustains and maintains the continuity of life. The sexual impulse in man is considered by sex-worshippers the perceptible expression of the vast, invisible Primal Power to which is attributed the universe. Certain sectarians conceive this power to be dual, while others maintain that it is One which embodies in itself both the male and female principles.

According to one of the *Upanishads** the Supreme Being, desirous of creating man, split himself into two thus becoming male and female. And out of the union of the two was produced man. In the *Mahabharata* the dual nature of all existence is emphasized: "He who asserts any other cause than Iswara† or affirms that there is any female not marked by Devi‡ in the three worlds including all things movable and immovable, let that fool be thrust out. Know everything which is male to be Iswara and all that is female to be Vema (a name of Devi), for this whole world movable and immovable is pervaded by these two bodies." This dual conception of the universe, though not so popular as the Monistic conception, has a sound hold on the religion of the Hindus. Even the monistic theory, when well-examined, is inclined to split Godhead into Brahma and its ever-present complement Maya. One of the forms God is worshipped in India is as Ardhanariswara, *i.e.*: Shiva in the form of half-man, half-woman. The figure that represents this conception of Godhead is masculine on the right side and feminine on the left.

The most ancient philosophy that explains the dual conception of the universe is Sankhya. The Sankhya does not support a belief in a Supreme Being or God. It teaches the existence of numerous Purushas or male entities which are pure and quiescent in themselves and of Prakriti (the female principle) the vast mainstay of the universe. The Purushas, independent of Prakriti, are passive, but they come into constant contact with Prakriti and give rise to the phenomenal world. Prakriti, the female, is essentially active and since all activity is conditioned by Time, Space and Causation, the Purusha that gets caught by Prakriti necessarily becomes bond. Every living being is thus a combination of Purusha and Prakriti, and the object of life is the liberation of Purusha from Prakriti.

The early Vedic literature generally sings the praises of male deities, but a few goddesses like Ushas, Saraswati and Aranyani are mentioned and worshipped as subordinate to the great males like Indra, Varuna and the Maruts. The probabilities are that sex worship did not form part of Rig Vedic religion. There are even hymns in the *Rig Veda* which show that a tribe inimical to Indo-Aryans had for their worship the Shishna (*membrum virile*). In the post-Vedic period, when Hinduism assimilated non-Aryan cultures and beliefs, the worship was probably recognized as orthodox and desirable.

The post-Vedic period of Hinduism is marked by the rise of the three great Puranic deities, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, who form the Hindu triad. Brahma is the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer of the universe. The worship of Brahma does not appear to have been widespread at any time in the history of the Hindus. Vishnu, on the other hand, is a powerful deity enjoying the allegiance of millions of Hindus and have wealthy shrines all over India. But the most important deity of the pantheon is Shiva.

* Mystic doctrines attached to the *Vedas*. † A name of Shiva as the Supreme Deity. ‡ One of the many names of the wife of Shiva.

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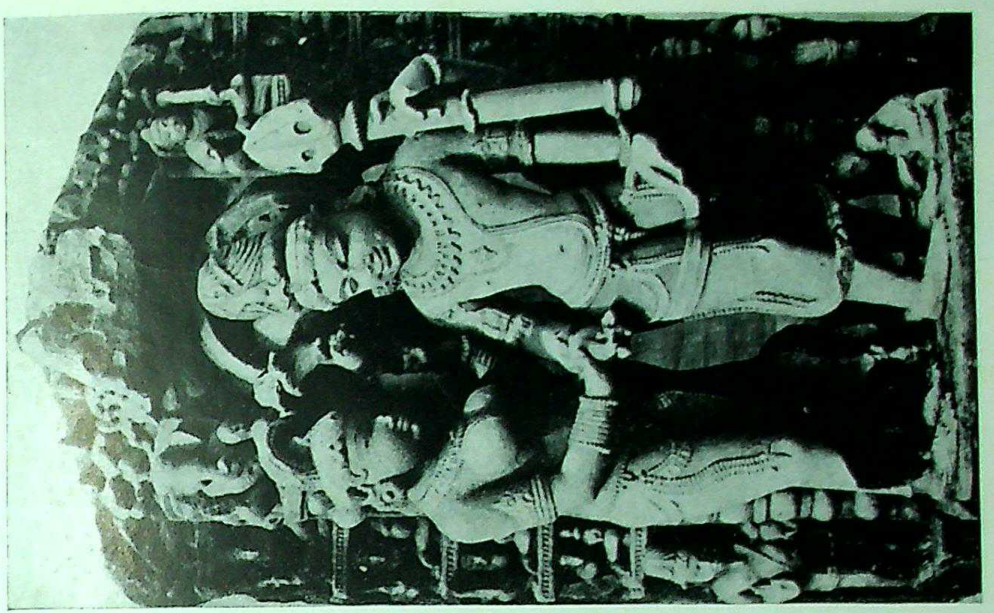

195 MARRIAGE OF SHIVA AND PARVATI
Khajuraho : 11th Century A. D.
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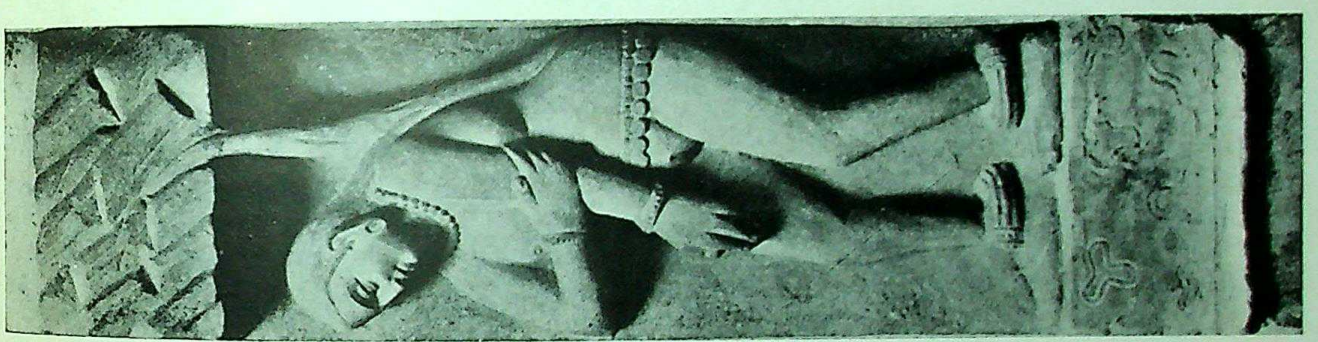
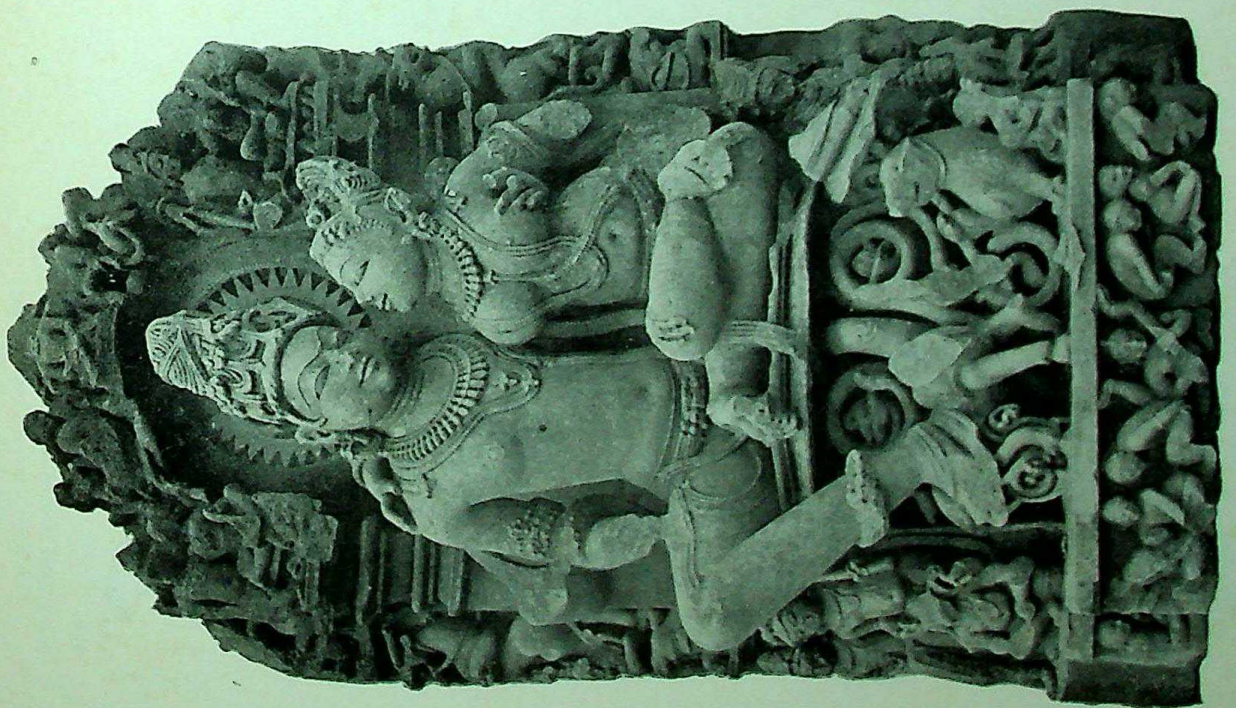


194 BATHING BEAUTY
Mathura : 2nd Century A. D.



193 SHIVA AND PARVATI ON MOUNT KAILAS
Khajuraho : 11th Century A. D.
Chhattarpur State Museum

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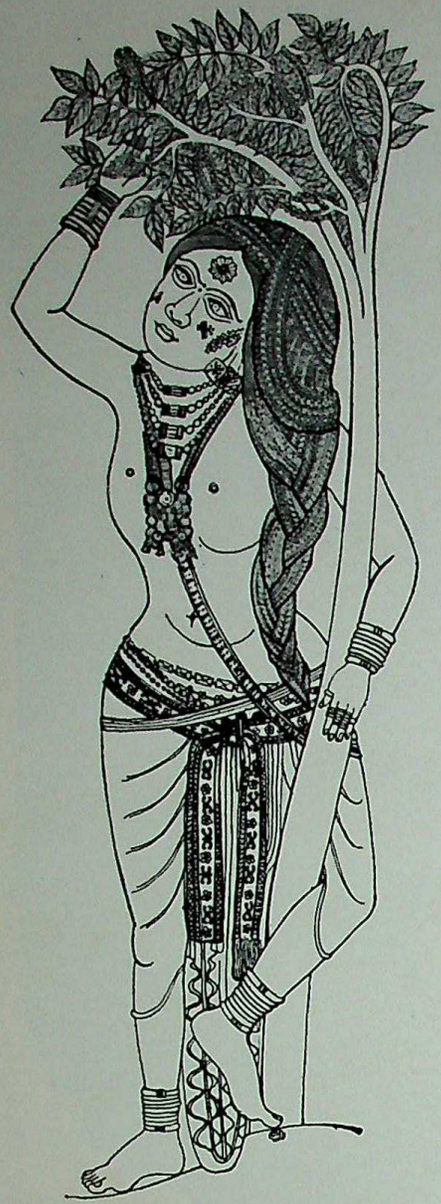

196 YAKSHI
A mythical woman of the voluptuous type: She haunts trees: From Barhut: 2nd Century B. C.

197 SHIVA AND PARVATI
From sculpture: Bihar, 12th Century A. D.

198 SRI
Goddess of Plenty and Fertility: She nurses the universe. From sculpture, Mathura: 2nd Century A. D.

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199 SHIVA AND PARVATI IN AN AMOROUS POSE
Bhuvanesvar, Orissa : 10th Century A. D.

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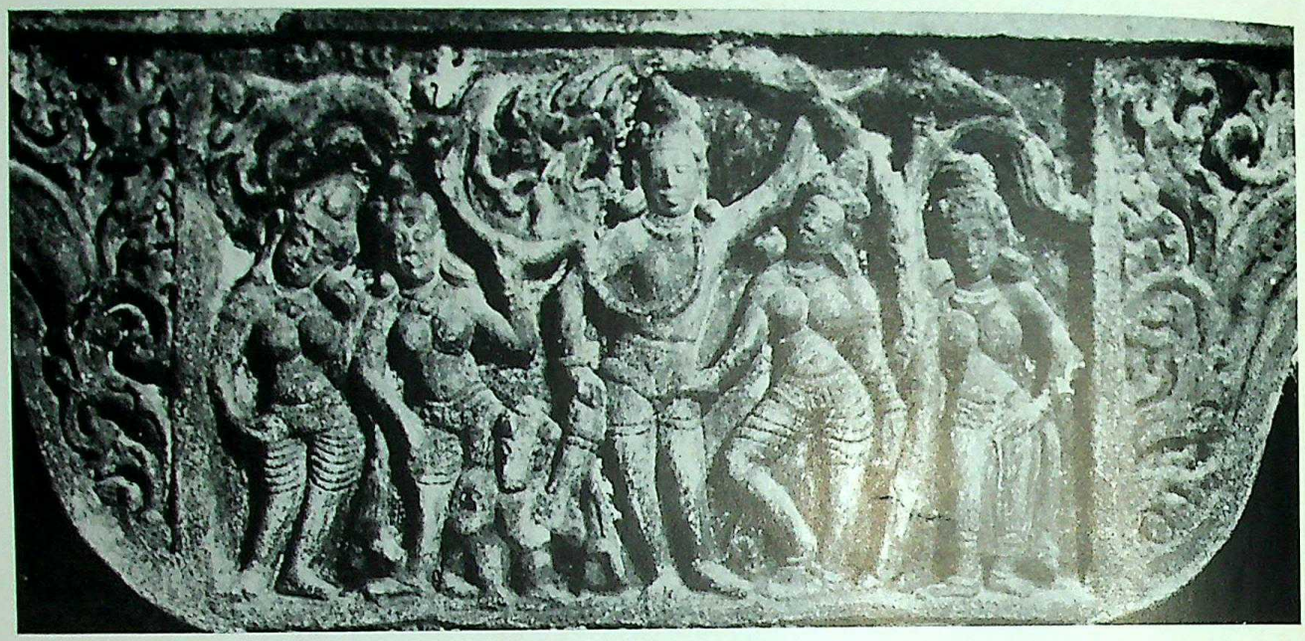

200 KAMA, THE GOD OF LOVE AND RATI HIS WIFE
Badami, Bijapur : 7th Century A. D.
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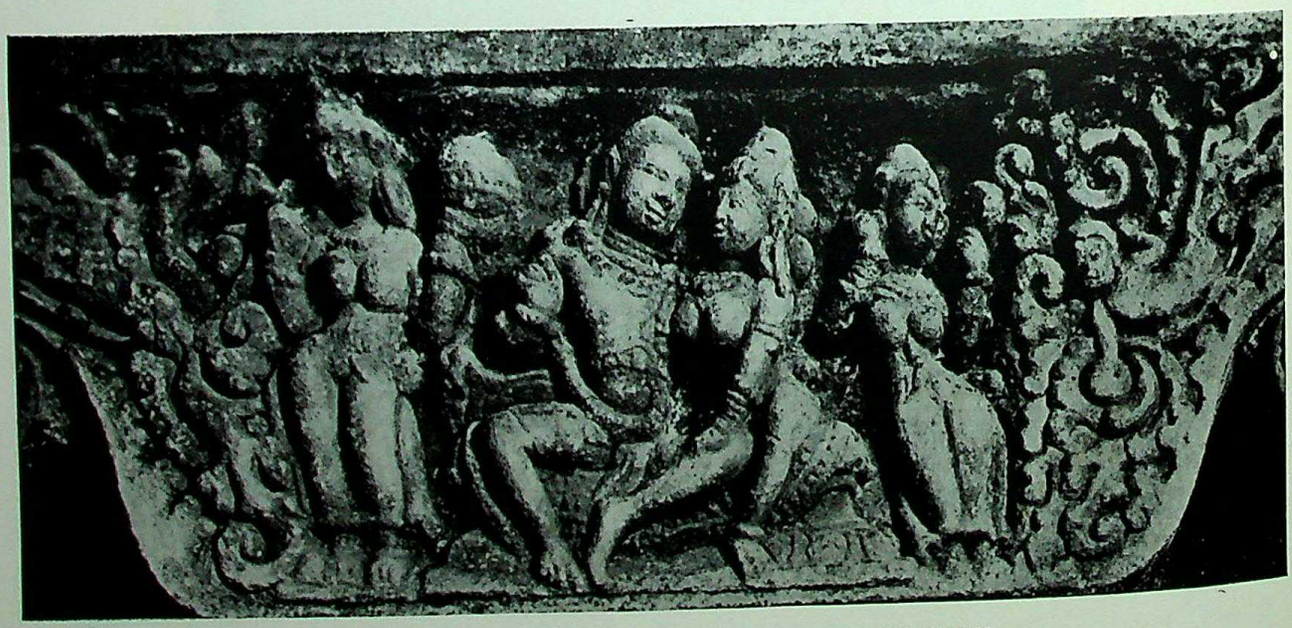

201 SHIVA AND PARVATI ENJOYING DOMESTIC FELICITY
Badami, Bijapur: 7th Century A. D.
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Worship of Shiva is connected with the heyday of Hindu glory, and throughout the long period of cultural, political and religious greatness of the community Shiva has held the position of the Supreme Deity. The great emperors of Hindu legend, Vikramaditya and Bhoja for instance, were Shaivas. The well-known literary works of the Hindus like the plays of Kalidasa, the *Katha Sarit Sagara* of Somadeva etc. were dedicated to Shiva. The temples of fabulous wealth which attracted Mohammed Ghazni to India belonged to Shiva and even at present the noblest edifices in Hindu India are Shaiva shrines. Compared to Shaivism, Vaishnavism is almost modern, and it rose to its present eminence only after the Rajput period.

Although his main function is destruction, Shiva through the enthusiasm of sectarians, has obtained a universal character and is representative of the snythetic nature of Hinduism embracing in its wide scope all forms of belief from highest philosophic conceptions to barbarous animism. We are, however, mainly concerned with that aspect of his worship which has a relation to the phenomenon of sex.

According to Shaiva conceptions, destruction is not essentially different from regeneration. Destruction is, in fact, a prelude to construction, nay, an essential part of construction. For nothing can be made out of nothing, and creation is but rebuilding. Hence Shiva, say the Shaivas, embodies in himself the function of Brahma as well, and the god of destruction is also the god of regeneration. In the latter capacity he is represented as the Lingam or phallus.

In temples dedicated to this phase of Shaiva worship, the principal idol is a mound-shaped stone, usually supported in a round base. The base and the mound combined is symbolic of the divine sex act which is believed to sustain the universe. The symbols themselves do not suggest anything indecent, and thousands of respectable Hindu ladies worship them without probably knowing the true significance of the symbols. The symbols of regeneration are made as inoffensive to public taste as possible. This, however, cannot be said to be true of all shrines, and the decorative art of some Hindu temples is not as decent as social decorum would demand. But then the Hindu believes that a certain amount of hypocrisy is essential for social life, and the stark realities of life may be revealed only in the secrecy of the bedroom and the emancipated atmosphere of a great shrine.

The worship of the Lingam, quite popular at present, does not seem to derive its sanction from the Vedas, the basic source of all Hindu beliefs. Some of the Rig Vedic hymns, as we have already seen, condemns the worshippers of the Shishna. Further, Shiva as such is not mentioned in the earlier Vedas, but the Shaivas, naturally anxious to establish the antiquity of their worship, maintain that Shiva is identical with Rudra mentioned in the *Rig Veda*.

The Shaivas attribute the origin of Lingam to the primary day of creation when Brahma and Vishnu sprang forth into being out of non-being. Both the gods, bewildered by their own birth, started questioning each other about their origin with a view to establish precedence and superiority, when they found shining beside them a resplendent Lingam of huge dimensions whose base or top they could not see. Brahma and Vishnu now stopped their argument, and, stupefied by the magnificence of the phenomenon asked each other what the appearance of the luminous Lingam meant. Before proceeding further into the enquiry they decided to first find out the actual dimensions of the Lingam ; with this object in view Vishnu assumed the form of a boar and dived downwards into the primal ocean, which generated the Lingam, to reach its base ; Brahma converted himself into a swift-winged swan with a desire to perch on the top of the Lingam and flew upwards. Vishnu, after years of diving found no base to the Lingam and considering further attempts futile returned to the surface of the waters to find Brahma waiting for him with news of

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success of his mission. The Lingam was indeed very high, said Brahma, but on strong wings he flew and perched on its top. Vishnu confessed he failed to reach the base of the Lingam upon which Brahma asked him to accept him as his superior. At this point, Shiva, the mighty owner of the Lingam, appeared on the scene and asked Brahma to give proof of his having reached the top of the Lingam. Brahma could not give any proof but was, on the contrary, proved a liar ; and Shiva as a punishment nipped off one of Brahma's five heads. Shiva approved of Vishnu's humble honesty and the Vaishnavas say that because of his supreme adherence to truth Vishnu was recognized by Shiva as his own superior ; a claim the Shaivas stoutly reject.

Although the worship and appearance of the Lingam have nothing indecent about them, some of the myths that explain the origin of the worship are not very flattering to Shaivas. In one account, for instance, we are told that Shiva fell under a curse and in consequence came to be worshipped as the Lingam. The god, becoming a widower by the death of his beloved wife Sati, lost interest in food and drink and wandered through the worlds like a demented creature. While he was passing through a forest in this state, the young wives of the sages who lived there happened to meet him and asked him the cause of his distress. Shiva told them that he had a beautiful wife who had immolated herself to avenge a slight he suffered at the hands of her father, and he was mourning her death. On hearing this lamentable story a gay young lady laughed aloud. Shiva wished to know the cause of her hilarity and was told by the fair mocker that he looked indeed a man for whom a beautiful young woman would commit suicide ! This taunt so infuriated the god of virility that he violated her. Her husband came on the scene and cursed the god to be worshipped as the Lingam.

Two other accounts of the curse give us less unfavourable impression of Shiva's conduct. One is that a sage named Bhrigu visited Shiva and was made to wait outside the house, as the god was engaged in making love to his wife whom he had recently married. Shiva, being a virile god, took a great deal of time before he could finish his business with his wife and the sage losing his patience by long waiting cursed the god to become a Lingam. The other account is that Shiva one day roamed into a forest with his wife and, forgetting that the spot was sacred to the sages, suddenly became amorous. In the heat of the moment he lost all sense of decorum and embraced his spouse in an open place. As ill-luck would have it some of the sages who inhabited the woods came that way, and saw Shiva and his wife in each other's arms. The outraged saints converted Shiva into a Lingam by a curse.

These unfavourable accounts of Shiva's activities were probably inspired by rival sectarians who wished to bring Shaivism into disrepute. But some descriptions of the Lingam by the Shaivas themselves are not strictly decorus.

The cult of the Lingam is not to be confused with certain sensuous practices of which we will have to take notice later on. Lingam-worship is not accompanied by promiscuity or any sexual activity whatever. In fact, Shiva, the god of virility, is an enemy of Kama, the god of sensuality. One of the well-known myths of the Hindus tells us that Shiva killed Kama, and 'Madanari' (the enemy of Kama) is one of his numerous epithets.

It may be interesting to learn that the most puritanic Hindu sect, judging from Western standards, are the Lingayats who worship the Lingam to the exclusion of all other deities. They wear small Lingams on their persons, and no Lingayat worth his name would allow this symbol of god to be removed from his body even for a short while. The sect recognize no other god, and maintain that the Lingam is a perfect representation of god. The sect originated in the 12th century A.D. and the founder was one Basava. The Lingayats are strict vegetarians and abjure liquor and even tobacco. They hold sorcery and magic, so

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essential to some Hindu cults, in abhorence and maintain that widow marriages are permissible and child marriages not. The souls of the Lingayats are believed to find union with God on death, and no rites and prayers for the dead are allowed among them. The Lingayats recognize no caste and hold that all men are equal in the eyes of god. Some are, by vocation, priests and are known as Jangamas. These priests are allowed to marry, but most of them remain celibate of their own accord and devote their lives to the propagation of their views doing service to others. The ascetics usually wander all over the country visiting the five great Lingayat centres called Simhasanas. These centres are situated at Kadur, Ujjain, Benares, Srisailam and Kedarnath. "In every Lingayat village there is a monastery affiliated to one of these five establishments." *

The Lingayats number about two million souls at present, and are found mostly in South India. They make no secret of their religion, but take a legitimate pride in it and exhibit the Lingam they carry for public view. The Lingam (usually made of grey soapstone) is worn round the neck enclosed in a red scarf or in a silver locket.

Lingams are mainly of two kinds, *i.e.* : Anadi or Swayambhu (which means 'without beginning' or 'self-generated'), and man-made. Lingams of the Swayambhu type are rocks or stones of a peculiar shape and considered by tradition and legend as self-generated and sanctified on that account. While the greatness and majesty of such Lingams are said to be indescribable, the *Mahanirvana Tantra* maintains that the magnificence of Lingams fashioned by human hands can, with difficulty, be described :

"Brahma, Vishnu, Indra and the other Devas reside where Mahadeva is in his Linga form.

"Thirty-five million known and unknown places of pilgrimages and all the holy places abide near Shiva. The land within a radius of a hundred cubits of the Linga is declared to be Shiva-Kshetra. This land of Shiva is very sacred. It is more excellent than the most excellent of holy places, because there always abide all the immortals and there are all the holy places.

"There is no doubt that by the installation of a Shivalinga a man acquires ten million times the merit which is acquired by giving the world and all its gold, by the performance of ten thousand horse-sacrifices, by the digging of a tank in a waterless country, or by making happy the poor and such as are enfeebled by disease." †

So much for the greatness of the Lingam. Shiva, apart from his forceful activity as the god of virility, has a more pleasing function as an affectionate husband and father. The 'holy family' of the Hindus consists of Shiva, his wife Parvati and two sons Ganesha and Kartikeya. The family, no doubt, is poor, but happy. The only means of livelihood for Shiva is begging in the streets of heaven. He was reduced to this plight by a curse of his compeer Brahma. We have noticed elsewhere that on the day of creation, Shiva had occasion to punish Brahma by cutting off one of his five heads ; Brahma did not take this punishment without resentment but cursed Shiva and condemned him to perpetual penury.

Puranic accounts of Shiva's marriage and family life are interesting. Shiva married Sati against the wishes of her father Daksha, a celestial patriarch. When Sati came of age to be married, so goes the story, Daksha sent out invitations to all the gods of heaven except Shiva to attend her Swayamvara. He thought that Shiva, what with his perpetual penury and unclean habits, would not make a suitable husband for his daughter who had been brought up in a luxurious style. But Sati was an enthusiastic admirer of the wandering mendicant. So, when she came to the Swayamvara hall for her marriage and did not

* *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Sir Charles Eliot.
† Tr.: Arthur Avalon.

पुस्तकालय
गुरुकुल काँगड़ी

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find Shiva there, she, contemplating the deity, threw upwards the marriage garland that was in her hand ; Shiva immediately made himself manifest on the spot and received the garland. Daksha was then forced to give Sati in marriage to Shiva with as good a grace as he could command under the circumstances.

The strained relations were not, however, mended during the wedding feast. Both parties nursed their grievances and waited for an opportunity for revenge. Shiva, soon, got a chance to show his contempt of Daksha. The scene of trouble, this time, was Brahma's palace. This god held a feast and invited all the gods and sages to attend it. Shiva was one of the guests who came early and he took his seat by the side of Brahma. Daksha came somewhat late and on his entering the hall most of the gods and sages rose from their seats out of respect for the aged patriarch. Shiva, however, did not rise. The patriarch noticed the slight and immediately launched a verbal attack on his ill-mannered son-in-law, and even asked for his expulsion from the hall. Shiva, on the other hand, maintained that, being a member of the trinity, he was superior to Daksha and was not bound to get up when Daksha entered. Brahma's offer of mediation in the quarrel was not accepted and the irate Daksha left the hall in disgust.

Daksha now decided to teach his overbearing son-in-law a severe lesson. He made arrangements for the performance of a great sacrifice and invited all the gods and goddesses, sages and patriarchs for the occasion but omitted the names of Shiva and Sati from his list of guests. The sage Narada, always out for mischief, finding in the situation promise of a grand quarrel, went and told Sati all about the sacrifice and the pointed omission. Sati wished to have an explanation from her father and went to the sacrifice uninvited. She created a scene in Daksha's house, and the patriarch had to tell her plainly and openly what he thought of his son-in-law. Sati felt terribly insulted by the affront, and to vindicate her husband's honour jumped into the sacrificial fire and burnt herself to death.

An infuriated Shiva immediately appeared in Daksha's house with an army of formidable fiends and inflicted a terrible punishment on Daksha and his partisans. He chopped off Daksha's head and flung it into space.

Sati, however, was irretrievably lost and Shiva in sadness repaired to his lonely mountain abode in Kailas and gave himself up to meditation and the practice of ascetic exercises.

Now things happened in heaven which made the gods contrive for the remarriage of the widower. A demon named Taraka received a boon by which he could be killed by no one except a son of Shiva ; when he found that Shiva had taken to asceticism he ruled out the possibility of this god ever getting a son and started terrorizing the fourteen worlds. The gods went in fear of him. The moon had to shine perpetually without waning. The sun was not permitted to give more than the heat Taraka required. The rain god had to yield his refreshing showers out of season. The wind god had to blow a zephyr throughout the year. The earth herself sank in despair because of the unreasonable demands of Taraka on her. In this predicament the gods made a joint request to Shiva to give up his asceticism, marry and beget a son strong enough to destroy Taraka. But Shiva would not be disturbed in his asceticism and turned a deaf ear to the plaints of the gods.

Pleadings proving of no avail, the celestials decided to force a marriage on Shiva. Kama, the love-god, was commissioned by them to go to Kailas and raise desire in Shiva by means of his love-laden flower shafts. This god undertook the mission reluctantly ; for Shiva was well-known for irascibility and any one who disturbed him in his meditation was not likely to get away with it. Anyhow, persuaded by the other gods Kama went on his perilous errand.

Hiding by the shadows of the trees that stood on Kailas, Kama crept to the mount and started looking for a vantage point for shooting his flower shaft. The awe-inspiring

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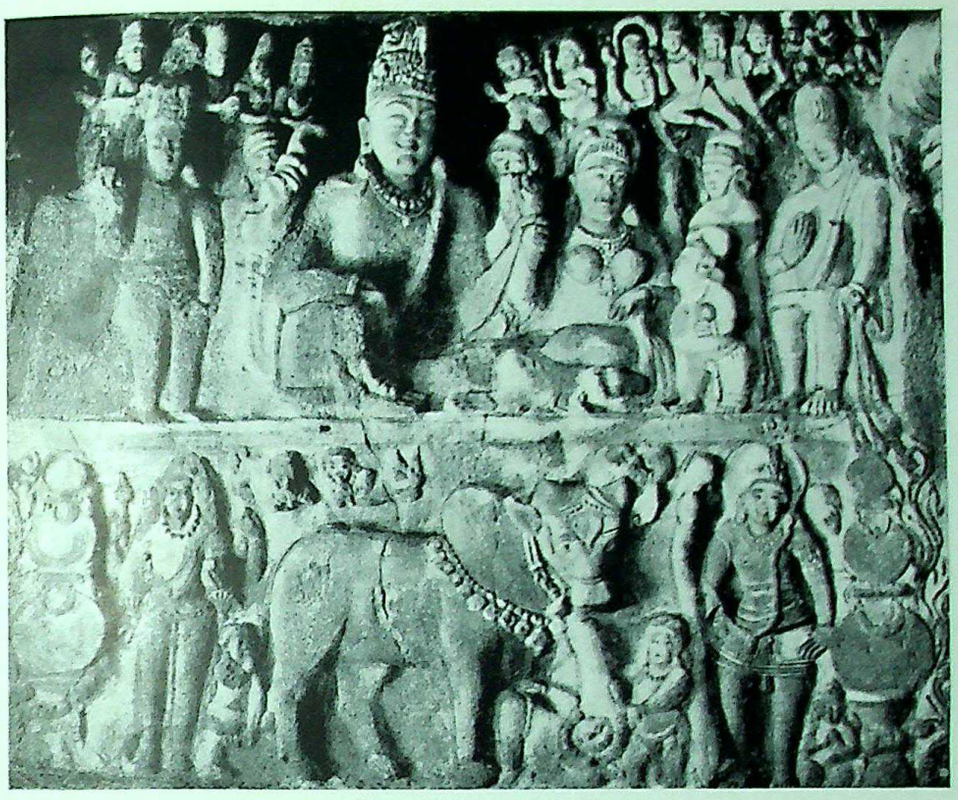

202 MARRIAGE OF SHIVA AND PARVATI
Ellora : 8th Century A. D.

203 THE KISS, ORISSAN STYLE
Lingaraja Temple : 11th Century A. D.

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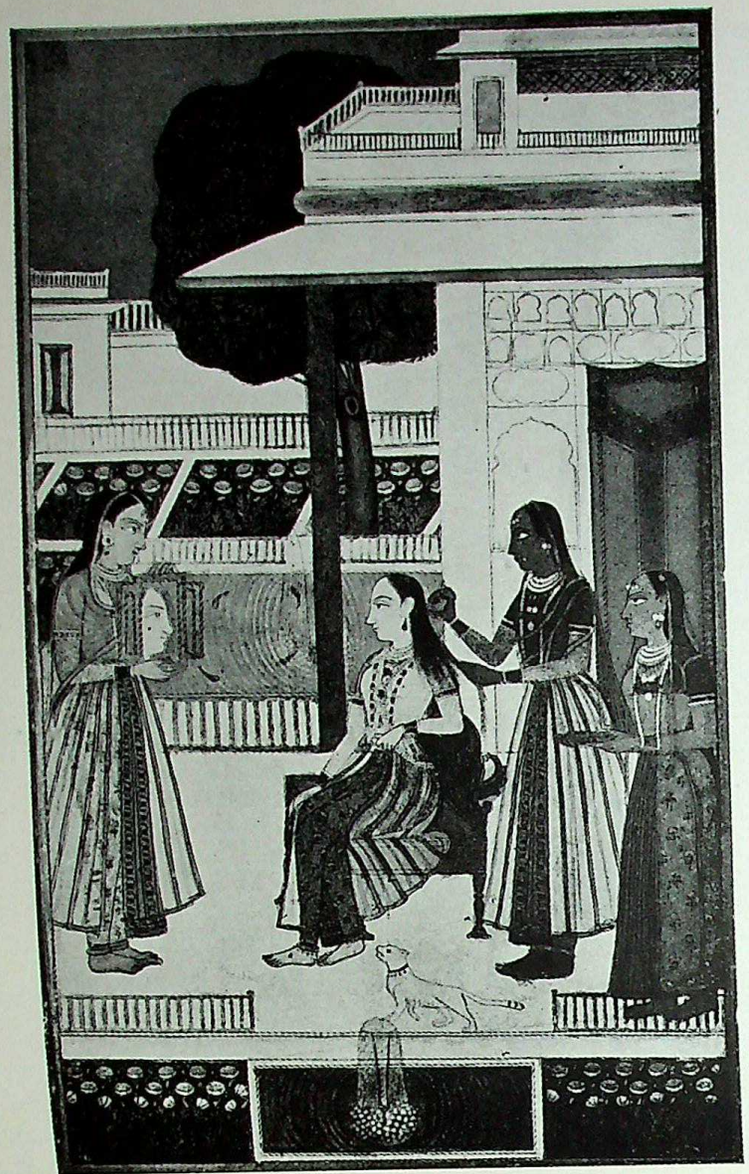
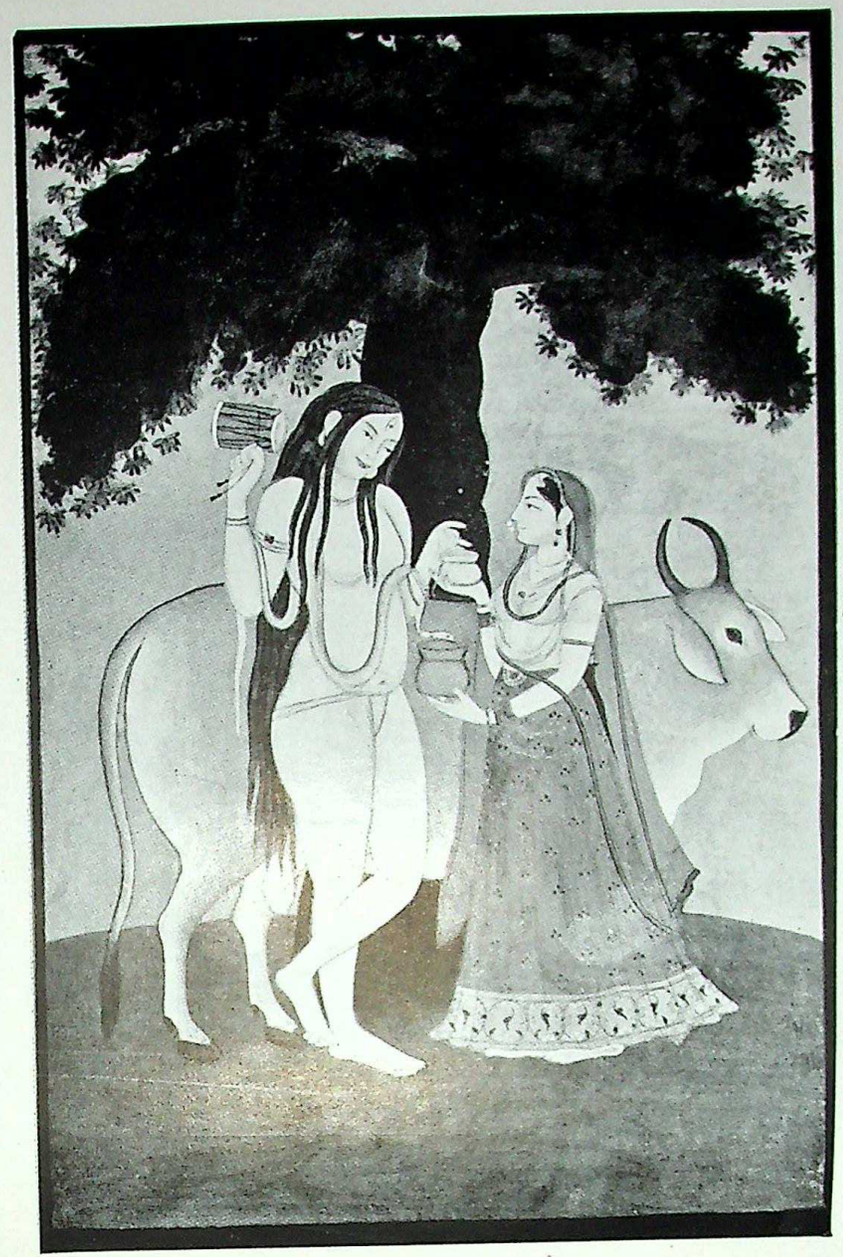


204 A MAID DRESSING A LADY'S HAIR
Rajput School of painting: 17th Century A. D.
From *La Peinture Indienne*, Stchoukine



205 SHIVA AND PARVATI BESIDE THEIR CHARGER NANDI
Kangra School: 18th Century A. D.

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206 SHIVA AND PARVATI WITH THEIR CHARGER NANDI THE BULL
From sculpture, Badami : 7th Century A. D.

207 SHIVA ADMIRING HIS SLEEPING SPOUSE
Pahari School of painting : 18th Century A. D.

Kangra School: 18th Century A.D.
Rajput School of painting
From *La Peinture Indienne*, Stchoukine

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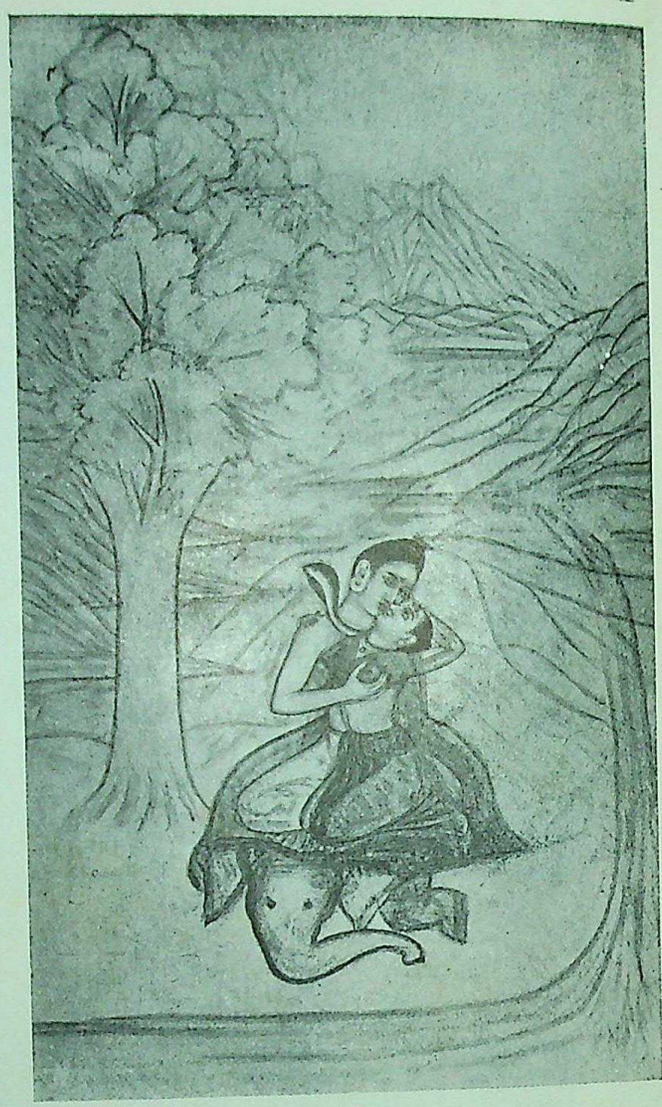
208 HAIR DRESSING
Kurnool : 18th Century : From *Art of India and Pakistan*, Leigh Ashton



209 SHIVA AND PARVATI IN BLISS
Rajput School of painting : 17th Century : From *La Peinture Indienne*, Stchoukine

210 RASALILA
Book cover, Bengal : 18th Century A. D. From *Art of India and Pakistan*, Leigh Ashton

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atmosphere of the place overwhelmed Kama and his heart sank within himself on the thought of disturbing the great ascetic. And then he saw a maiden of exceeding loveliness plucking flowers by the bowers near the ground where Shiva sat in meditation.

This lovely maiden was none other than Sati herself reborn as Parvati, daughter of Himavan (the Himalayas). Parvati had awareness of her fomer life, and on coming of age wished to get married to Shiva once again. With this object in view she had been worshipping the god assiduously and was always near about Kailas so that the god could fall a victim to her charms and ask for her hand. But neither her charms nor her blandishments proved of any avail, and the great ascetic sat in deep meditation oblivious to the prayers and pranks of the lovely Parvati.

Anyhow, the sight of Parvati emboldened the love god. Selecting an opportune moment wherein Parvati showed an excellent profile to Shiva, Kama shot the fatal shaft.

Shiva felt the sting, and his mind, in the words of the poet, was troubled like a calm sea agitated by a sudden gale. He opened his eyes and saw the beautiful Parvati plucking flowers in the bower ; he was about to smile amorously on her when he noticed the archer sneaking by the curve of a tree-trunk. Shiva immediately divined the cause of his distraction and opening his blazing third eye burnt the god of love to death ! After this he closed his eyes again, and continued his meditation.

Parvati found that her beauty was of no avail. Nor did devotion bring her the god's love. Becoming desperate, she herself took to asceticism like Shiva, and tortured her frail body. The rigorous course of her penances generated so much heat that Shiva could not sit in Kailas. Disturbed in his meditation, Shiva left Kailas, went in search of Parvati and appeared before her in the guise of a dwarfish Brahmin. He wished to know of her why she persecuted her tender body in so rigorous a manner. Parvati told him of her hopeless love for Shiva and the sense of frustration that led her to asceticism. The Brahmin assuming an amused expression began to dwell upon the failings of Shiva, his ugly form, unclean habits and perpetual penury. He became so eloquent on the subject that Parvati could not stand it any longer and shouted at him. On this the dwarf was metamorphosed into Shiva, and on his promising to marry her, the delighted Parvati gave up her asceticism and returned to her father's abode. Shiva duly approached Himavan for his daughter's hand, and the willing father gave her in marriage to him according to the prescribed rites.

It may be mentioned that Rati, widow of Kama, attended the wedding and she begged of the bride to request her lord to do something for the regeneration of Kama. Parvati took pity on the poor widow and at her intercession Shiva permitted Kama to be reborn. Accordingly the love-god was reborn as Pradyumna, son of Krishna and Rukmini.

Parvati is a dutiful wife and the domestic felicity enjoyed by Shiva and Parvati is a popular theme of the Hindu poet. In all Shiva temples, Parvati is also worshipped.

It is interesting to note that though the gods expressly desired a son to be born to Shiva for the destruction of Taraka, after his marriage they began to feel that the progeny of such virile lovers like Shiva and Parvati would be more tyrannous than Taraka himself. Hence they supplicated Shiva, and this god promised that he would not have any children by Parvati. This lady came to know of this, and in her anger cursed all the goddesses of heaven to become barren even like herself. That, however, did not satisfy her maternal instinct. So one day when Shiva was away she moulded out of the oil and other substances used in her toilet the form of a boy and breathed life into him. She called the young man her son and asked him to guard her apartments. Soon after, Shiva returned and was not a little surprised to see a stranger at the door of Parvati's room ; he rudely asked the young man who he was, and this person as rudely replied that it was no concern of an intruder whose duty was to keep away from a respectable lady's apartments. Words led to blows, and the irate Shiva cut off the young god's head and sent it flying through space.

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Parvati now came upon the scene, and seeing the destructive work of her husband gave herself up to lamentations for her lost son, and this brought all the gods of heaven to Kailas. Parvati would not be pacified by anything the gods said and she wanted her son back. Vishnu now started a hunt for the lost head, but this member could not be found anywhere in the fourteen worlds. So he cut off the head of an elephant he happened to find on the way, and grafted this head to the trunk of Parvati's son. Thus the origin of Ganesha, the elephant-headed deity of the Hindu pantheon.

Ganesha is an amiable god. He is pictured in art as a pot-bellied, short-legged god with an elephant's head and wisdom. He rides on a mouse. As the Remover of Obstacles, he is worshipped by every orthodox Hindu before beginning any undertaking. Born independent of his father, Ganesha is the favourite of his mother.

Ganesha was not, however, equal to the task of killing the demon Taraka, and for this purpose another son was born to Shiva. Kartikeya or Kumara was also begotten in a mysterious way. The fire-god Agni happened to get 'the seed' of Shiva in a manner into the details of which we need not go, and as he was carrying it across the Ganges, the precious possession fell in the river. From the seed was hatched a baby. Six princesses happened to see the resplendent baby on the bank of the Ganges and all of them wished to suckle it ; the divine baby then opened six mouths and with commendable impartiality sucked all the six of them. Hence Kumara is also known as Shunmukha, meaning 'having six faces'.

Kartikeya is the war god of the pantheon. He is said to be a bachelor and woman-hater in some accounts, and the husband of Devasena (army of the gods) in others. His main delight is war. He rides on a peacock. Born independently of the mother, he is the favourite of his father. Kartikeya killed Taraka and liberated the worlds from his oppression.

Shiva's is a happy family. But as in all happy families, there have been at times domestic quarrels in Shiva's house too. One day, for instance, Shiva came home from his begging round with very little in the bowl. The voracious Ganesha and the hungry Kartikeya ate most of what was in the bowl, and Ganesha's rat and Kartikeya's peacock finished off the rest. The result was, poor Parvati had to go without a meal. She would not have minded it, if only Shiva had a good word for her. But this god had an overdose of Ganja and completely doped by the effect of the drug slept comfortably oblivious to his wife's agony. Next morning Shiva got up late, and it looked as if that day too he would not get much to bring home for the wife and children. At this point Parvati protested. One thing leading to another, Parvati told her husband that it was impossible for her to live with a person like him. If that was the case, Shiva told her, the proper thing for her to do was to leave him. Parvati took him at his word and, collecting her children, left for her father's house.

The sages now intervened and brought about a reconciliation. The reconciliation was sweet and emotional, and Shiva hugged his beloved so violently that he became one with her. Thus the origin of Ardhanarisvara, the bisexual figure often found in Shaiva shrines.

Another case of petty quarrel may also be mentioned. One day Shiva was reading the scripture to Parvati and explaining to her the import of sacred writ, when this lady started nodding. Shiva was so exasperated by his wife's indifference to erudition that he cursed her to become a fisherwoman. Parvati immediately disappeared from Kailas and was born as a fishermaid. Shiva, however, could not get on without his wife and after some time managed to reclaim his wife from the fisher-folk.

It may be mentioned that in all these petty quarrels, reconciliation always follows ; a permanent rupture between Shiva and Parvati is inconceivable.

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Chapter Fifteen

SAKTAS

Saktas are those Hindus who consider Godhead to be essentially feminine. In the worship of the female deities, the outward decency that is associated with the cult of the Lingam is not always maintained. In fact most of the practices in Hinduism which appear objectionable to Westerners are connected in one way or other with the worship of the female principle. It is difficult to justify certain practices of the Saktas; nor can one appreciate the hair-splitting arguments advanced by apologists of Sakta cults in defence of animal and human sacrifice and salvation through Panchatatva worship. Although Rig Vedic Aryans did not have much to do with female deities, in later Hinduism the worship of goddesses became an important factor. It found its way into Hinduism probably through pre-Aryan cults which were incorporated into their religion by Indo-Aryans during the post-Vedic period. Pre-Aryan India had important female deities in the pantheon. Excavations at Mohan-jo-daro show that the principal deities of Indus Valley Dravidians were goddesses. In Dravidian India even at present worship of female deities is more widespread than that of gods.

An interesting feature of Hindu mysticism is that the active principle in the universe is always conceived as feminine. The Sankhya system, already noticed, provides a typical philosophical example of this view; the numerous Purushas or male entities are quiescent and free from activity till they get entangled with Prakriti or the female principle which is essentially dynamic. Similarly, Brahm or the Supreme Principle of Vedantins, the Hindu Monists, is Nirguna or without qualities and is passive, but the attendant Maya, the female principle, is vigorously active and is responsible for the visible world. This view is maintained in all Hindu mystic conceptions. The Hindus assert that the great gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are themselves passive, but that the Sakti (literally energy) of a god is responsible for his activity. This Sakti is said to be feminine and is worshipped as the wife of the god. A wider conception, mainly held by the Saktas, is that the Sakti of a god is essentially the god himself and apart from her the god has no existence. This view is further elaborated into an all-embracing Monism in which Sakti is said to be the Supreme Being, the all-in-all, identical with the Nirguna Brahm of the Vedantins. The Saktas maintain that Sakti pervades all, the whole universe is her emanation, that she is without form or qualities, vast and imperceptible, the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe all in one. But it is difficult to worship Sakti in the abstract, and for the benefit of the spiritually dull she is endowed with forms.

The most widely accepted form of Sakti is as the wife of Shiva. This distinguished position given to the wife of Shiva was probably occasioned by the greatness of Shiva himself, who, as we have already seen, was the principal god of the pantheon during the palmy days of Hinduism. Once installed in power, the wife of Shiva remained supreme and the rise of the Vaishnavas could not replace her in favour of the wife of Vishnu. It may, however, be mentioned, that Sakti in her wider aspect embraces not only the wives of other gods but even mortal women; nay the term is applied to everything feminine to include even the females of animals.

At present the worship of the wife of Shiva obtains all over India from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. One of her names is Himavati (daughter of the Himalayas) and another Kumari.* The wife of Shiva has many names and many forms typifying the various aspects of the deity, some mild, tender and kind, and others terrible and forbidding. The most commonly known names of Shiva's wife are, Durga, Devi, Uma, Sati, Parvati, Kali, Chinnamastaka, Bhavani, Rudrani, Kamakshi and Meenakshi. Each of these names

* Comorin is a corrupt form of Kumari. In Indian languages the cape is still known as Kumari, meaning virgin (goddess).

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signifies a certain aspect of Sakti and is worshipped with appropriate ritual, and temples can be found all over India dedicated to one or other form of the goddess. The most powerful strongholds of Sakti cult are, however, Bengal and Assam where the worship has been organized and systematised.

The Sakti cult represents Hinduism in its entirety. The goddess is worshipped in all conceivable aspects including those that are considered objectionable by modern notions.

The most tender and appealing form of Sakti-worship is as the Divine Mother. The conception has a sweetness all its own. The Christian conception of God as father and men as his children do not, the Saktas maintain, adequately express the relation between man and the deity. The father is a stern person and in his dealings with the children is ruled by reason and duty, whereas the mother in her affection forgets logic and duty. This is said to be typical of Godhead. God is not a judge or a taskmaster, but a loving mother who may even stoop to folly to please her child. The saint Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, the spiritual guide of the well-known Swami Vivekananda, was an ardent adherent of the Mother cult and he often used to fall into ecstasy in contemplating the love of the Great Mother. Even the philosophers Sankara and Vivekananda found a solace and joy in mother-worship which all their learning and logic could not give them. Both have composed passionate songs in praise of the goddess. Many enlightened Hindus of the present day are also Saktas in this respect.

A sacred verse in support of the cosmic importance of Sakti and the universal nature of her worship says :

"The Saktas call her Mother, for she is the great Mother, the Mahadevi who conceives, bears and nourishes the universe sprung from her womb. This is so because she is the active aspect of consciousness, imagining the world to be, according to the impressions derived from enjoyment and suffering in former worlds. It is natural to worship her as Mother. The first Mantra into which all men are initiated is the word Ma. It is the first word and generally the last." *

Again, "Maheswaras call her Sakti, Sankhyas Paraprakriti, worshippers of the sun Maharajani, Buddhists Tara, Charvakas Asha, Pasupathas Snata, Jainas Sri, followers of Brahma Shraddha, Vaidikas Gayatri, and the ignorant Mohini." †

The powers of Sakti are thus described in the *Mahanirvana Tantra :* (Shiva is revealing to Sakti her own greatness) :

"Thou art the very Paraprakriti of Brahma, the Paramatma, and from thee has sprung the whole universe. O Gracious One ! whatever there is in this world, of things which have and are without motion, from Mahat to an atom, owes its origin to and is dependent on thee. Thou art the origin of all manifestations ; thou art the birth-place of even us (the members of the trinity). Thou knowest the whole world, yet none knows thee. Thou art Kali, Tarini, Durga, Shodasi, Bhuvaneswari, Dhumavati, Begala, Bhairavi, Chinnamastaka, Annapurna, Vagdevi, Kamalalaya.‡ Thou art in the form of all the Saktis and thou pervadest the bodies of all the Devas. Thou art both subtle and gross, manifested and veiled, though in thyself formless, yet thou hast form. Who can understand thee ? For the helping of the worshipper, the good of the world and the destruction of the enemies of the gods, thou dost assume various forms. Thou art four-armed, two-armed, six-armed, and eight-armed and holdest various missiles and weapons for the protection of the universe." §

As Parvati or Uma, Sakti is the faithful wife of Shiva. This aspect of the goddess has been described in the previous chapter.

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* *Serpent Power*, Arthur Avalon. † *Mantra Sastra.*

‡ Different names of Sakti. § Tr. : Arthur Avalon.

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As Kumari (virgin) Sakti is worshipped for her blooming beauty and virgin purity. Temples dedicated to this form of Sakti are few, but in domestic rites and petty ceremonies Kumari holds a prominent place.

The most popular form of worship of Sakti is as Durga, the destroyer of evil. She is fabled to have assumed this formidable form for the destruction of a demon called Mahisha (buffalo) who could be killed by no one but a woman. The terrible fight the goddess had with Mahisha is described in vivid and revolting detail in many of the Hindu scriptures. Mahisha was not, however, the only demon Durga destroyed. She is reputed to have killed Sumbha and Nishumbha, Chanda and Munda and a host of other devils of whom the gods themselves lived in fear. One of the greatest Hindu festivals, Durgotsava is celebrated in honour of Durga's triumph over Mahisha. Till recently it was customary to sacrifice a buffalo on the occasion, but enlightened Hindus at present content themselves by cutting a Kalabash or some other vegetable or fruit symbolical of the custom.

The aspect of the goddess which symbolizes destruction as such is Kali, Bhavani or Chinnamastaka. The Hindus do not believe that destruction of evil alone is divine. The terrible and the destructive are as much part of nature and hence of Godhead as the pleasant and the beneficial. It is not the wicked alone that die. Death is inherent in all life, and essentially emanates from Godhead ; and the personification of this aspect of Sakti is commonly met with in the images of Kali or Chinnamastaka. The idol of Kali is usually done in black granite, with tusks that protrude from a mouth dripping blood. She is naked but for a garland of human skulls that hang from her neck. In one of her hands she holds a weapon and in the other the severed head of a victim. The image of Chinnamastaka is seen in a peculiarly revolting activity. She holds in one of her hands her own severed head with the mouth drinking the blood that spouts out of the hewn neck.

Kali is a popular goddess especially in Bengal and South India. Animal sacrifice is a common feature of all the shrines dedicated to the goddess. The most famous shrines of the terror aspect of Sakti are the Kali temple at Kalighat (from where Calcutta takes its name), and the Kamakhya temple in Assam. A continuous flow of blood is kept at the altars of the goddesses. The object of these sacrifices is to appease the goddess, ever thirsty for blood and destruction ; if the goddess is not appeased in this fashion, she is feared to forcibly claim victims by means of epidemics, pestilence, famine and cataclysms.

The terror aspect of Sakti is not, however, so important for the purpose of this book as the peculiar form of worship through what is known as Panchatatva. Before coming to Panchatatva worship proper, the reader will do well to remember a few points about the beliefs of certain Sakta sects.

The Saktas are broadly divided into Dakshinamargis or right-hand worshippers and Vamamargis or left hand worshippers. The Dakshinamargis worship Sakti publicly whereas the Vamamargis insist on complete secrecy in worship. The Vamamargis are also known as Tantrics because they follow the scriptures called *Tantras*. The word 'Tantra' means a simple precept and is at times used to indicate a complicated device. In a wider sense it is used as indicative of a large number of Hindu sacred books, but in its popular sense only those books which lay down rules for worship of Sakti through Panchatatva are meant.

The Tantrics maintain that the *Vedas* and other scriptures are meant for bygone ages and not for the present age of evil called by the Hindus Kaliyuga or the age of the demon Kali. To appreciate this theory, it is necessary for the reader to have some idea of the Hindu mythical cycle of time. The life of the world is divided into a number of Mahayugas each consisting of four Yugas or ages.* The first Yuga is known as Satyuga

* For a fuller description, please see *Hindu Religion, Customs* and *Manners*.

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or Kritayuga which is said to have been an age of perfect beings; in the second age, Thretayuga, virtue diminished by a quarter; in the third age, Dwaparayuga, evil became predominant; and in the Kaliyuga (our own wild days), there is little left in the world that is not evil. A description of the miseries and wickedness of Kaliyuga is found practically in every *Purana*. Men of this age are marked by their depraved tendencies. They love what is evil, and detest what is good; religious duty is neglected, and men develop an insatiable thirst for sensuous pleasures. Kings persecute their subjects, and the subjects rise in rebellion against the rulers. Nations wage war on nations and all perish through violence. Brahmins forsake the study of *Vedas* for the pursuit of pleasures and wealth, and low born men usurp the thrones of virtuous monarchs of noble blood. Friendship degenerates into mutual exploitation; and desire becomes the only attachment between men and women.

The Tantrics maintain that there is a certain amount of fatality in this state of affairs. Men have fallen so low that they are rendered incapable of realizing their fall. Hence the Tantrics tell us that the high precepts of the Vedic times are inapplicable to the men of Kaliyuga who are so stupid that they can neither understand nor appreciate them. According to them, the Vedic rites were meant for the Kritayuga, the Smritis (like the codes of Manu, Parasara etc.) for the Thretayuga, and the *Puranas* for the Dwaparayuga. For the Kaliyuga, we are told, the most important, in fact the only texts that can be followed with profit are the *Tantras*. The burden of the *Tantras* is to make worship attractive to men. The *Rudrayamala Tantra*, speaking of other forms of worship mentions that pleasure and religious merit seldom go together. The *Tantras*, however ensure both:

"Where there is worldly enjoyment there is no liberation; where there is liberation there is no worldly enjoyment. But in the case of the excellent devotees of Sri Sundari (a form of Sakti) both liberation and enjoyment are in the hollow of their hands."

Such a conception of worship might appear to the Christian a deliberate degeneration of religion. But the Hindu is extremely subtle in his logic and maintains that it is worse than useless to preach high ideals to a man who is incapable of understanding them. Yet religious forces in man must not be ignored; and every man is entitled to a form of worship suited to his genius and limitations. Hence the existence among the Hindus, those various practices, all different from one another, yet recognized as orthodox.

To make religion pleasant to the evil men of Kaliyuga, the *Tantras* prescribe worship by means of Panchatatva or the 'five elements or fundamental principles.' The Panchatatvas are vulgarly called the five Makaras (or simply M's, M being the first letter of each of the Tatvas). The five M's are: Madya or liquor, Mansa or meat, Matsya or fish, Mudra or Corn and Maithuna or sexual intercourse.

The *Tantras* give detailed instructions for worship through the Panchatatva. Rituals differ and precepts vary in detail. The most important ritual, however, is known as Chakrapuja or Circle Worship.

The rite is usually performed at night in the house of a wealthy Sakta where secrecy can be ensured, or in the inner shrine of some temple inaccessible to the public. The room where the rite takes place is cleaned and consecrated for the worship, and a circle of a prescribed radius is drawn. At the centre of the circle is drawn a Yantra* in which sits the host and his Sakti. Around them sit the guests, each beside his Sakti.†

The Saktis, represented of course by living women, are said to be of three kinds: Sviya or one's own wife, Parakiya or another man's wife, and Saddharani or common

* Yantra is a mystic diagram. Yantras play an important part in all Tantric ritual and are believed to possess magical powers.

† The Sakti sits to the left of the Sakta in Chakrapuja.

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woman. Some texts ordain that Maithuna is permissible only with the Sviya, while others hold that there is no harm in Maithuna with any woman, as every woman is in effect the living embodiment of Sakti.

The first act in the rite is the placing of the Kalasha or jar of wine, and the consecration of its contents. The jar is of given dimensions, but is big enough to hold a large quantity of liquor. It may be made of gold, silver, copper, bell-metal, crystal, stone or clay according to the substance of the host. A gold jar brings prosperity, silver emancipation, copper contentment, bell-metal nourishment, crystal love, stone fascination and clay all in small proportions.

After filling the jar with wine, it is placed in front of the host and his Sakti on a jewelled altar enclosed in a mystic diagram. Incantations are now repeated to counteract the curse of Sukra* and turn wine into nectar. After the consecration of the jar and its contents, cooked meat, fish and gram are brought in large quantities. These are blessed by repetition of incantations and by appropriate mystic gestures known as Mudras.

Drinking may now start. With the first cup the devotee eats meat, with the second fish, with the third gram, with the fourth all these and with the fifth anything he desires. The *Mahanirvana Tantra* ordains that not more than five cups of wine must be drunk during the worship after which sexual union must take place. Here again the *Mahanirvana Tantra* insists that a man shall have Maithuna with Sviya only, that is one's own wife. Excess in drinking is deprecated. The drinking rule for the Tantric rite is given as follows :

"They may drink until the sight or the mind is not affected. To drink beyond this is bestial. How is it possible for a sinner who becomes a fool through drink and who maligns the Sadhaka of Sakti to say 'I worship the Adya Kalika'?"

The *Mahanirvana*, however, is one of the mildest of the *Tantras* and it is quite probable that the injunctions contained in this scripture are not always followed ; in fact the tone of the warning itself indicates that excess is not rare in Kaula rites†. One of the objects of Tantric rites is said to be the raising of the devotee above all sense of right and wrong, an ideal often emphasized in Hindu mysticism ; and we know for certain that the Tantric rites of Mahayana Buddhists were attended by much debauchery and exhortation to actions which society considers evil or sinful. Even the symbolic killing of the Buddha was indulged in by Mahayana Tantrics to show their complete emancipation from the binding sense of good and evil which is believed to prevent a man from realising the absolute unity of Godhead. As Buddhism and Hinduism have borrowed much from each other, it is probable that Hindu Kaula rites also ended up in excessive drinking and communal Maithuna.

This rite which appears so very strange not only to Westerners but to the generality of Hindus themselves, has a sound philosophy in its support. Able apologists have justified it on various grounds, of whom mention may be made of the English Knight who wrote under the pen-name of Arthur Avalon. He has translated many Tantric texts and has explained the true nature and meaning of this strange cult. Quoting Tarkalankara, a scholarly Hindu commentator on Tantric texts, he says of the Panchatatva rite :

"By the poison which kills all animals, by that same poison the physician destroys disease. The root of Homeopathy is to cure illness by that which causes illness. Amongst us also there is the tradition that poison is destroyed by poison. What then is that which makes man sin and die before his time, the object of contempt of all : The first amongst

* Vedic Aryans used to drink spirituous liquors. The sage Sukra who happened to drink the ashes of his disciple in a cup of wine is said to have cursed all intoxicants and prohibited their use. Manu and other law-givers enforce prohibition on the three higher castes in general and very strictly on Brahmins.

† Tantric rites are also called Kaula rites, becuase of its supposed noble nature ; Kaula means either ancient or noble.

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these causes are wine and women ; meat, fish, corn are accessories. These five Tatvas are the primary cause of the terrible, incurable disease which is Sansara (worldly life). Man under the influence of wine becomes devoid of manliness, and worthless. The stupefying power of wine and woman is so great as to attract even the pious and wise and hurl them into the abyss of darkness and ignorance. Here Shiva (the propounder of the Tantric system) prescribes poison which eradicates poison. We know as other Sadhakas do that this Homeopathic system of Shiva is infallible and yields speedy results. He who thirsts for wine or lusts after women can be cured by this treatment within a very short time. But the physician, that is the Guru, must be experienced and skillful. A slight error in the administration of the poison may lead to fatal result. On this account Shiva said that the path of Kaula rite is more difficult than it is to walk on the edge of a sword or to embrace the neck of a tiger. Here we give a popular or exoteric explanation of the Tatvas. But if the esoteric meaning of them be also known then it will be seen that in the matter of Sadhana they are absolutely necessary. No one who is not a *Tatva-Jnani* (Knower of First Principles) can master their esoteric meaning. On this account Shiva has prohibited the disclosure of the Sadhana to ordinary people. We have ourselves seen people who claim to be Kaulas, but as a fact they are no better than drunkards and libertines. O Reader, blame not Kulachara on seeing these erring men. A libertine and drunkard can never be a Kaula. The Kaula method is unique. He cannot be a drunkard and libertine. On seeing a woman he sees his mother and Ishtadevata in her and in either mind or body makes obeisance to her. The saints Gauranga, Nityananda and Advaita are brilliant examples of the true Kaula. In the *Mahabharata* and *Vishnupurana* it has been said that desire cannot be quenched by the enjoyment of objects of that desire. On the contrary desire flames up like fire when Ghee is thrown upon it. This is very true. No one says that the drinking of poison will not kill. But the physician administers poison in such a wonderful way that it does not kill the patient but on the contrary the poison in the body is destroyed. The way in which the Guru administers the poison of wine and thus destroys the poison of Sansara cannot be disclosed before the unworthy and so this is prohibited by Shiva."

However revolting Kaula practices may appear especially inside the sanctuaries of worship, their conduct in society is praise-worthy. The generality of Kaulas, no doubt inspired by Tantric doctrines, show a sound respect for woman as the visible representation of the goddess. The Tantrics have all along been bitter enemies of widow-burning, and many of the passages that praise women in the law-books and epics of the Hindus are inspired by Tantric doctrines. Killing of women or even causing minor hurts to them is denounced as a heinous sin by the Tantrics. They encourage widow marriages and maintain that women married to impotent men have right of divorce and remarriage. The use of woman as a mere object of pleasure is also denounced by the Kaulas.

A good part of Tantric ritual consists of magic. The Yantras, and certain monosyllables like Hring, Kling etc. are believed to possess terrific power if properly used. The power of Mantras or spells is also great and Tantric texts give elaborate instructions on how, when and where to repeat them and attain occult powers known as Siddhis. The best method of attaining Siddhi or even liberation is said to be to rouse Kundalini. This is believed to be a mystic force in fact Sakti herself, lying coiled in the body of every person in the form of a serpent. Normally Kundalini is dormant and she is to be roused by means of a complicated system of Yogic exercises aided by repetition of proper Mantras and showing of Mudras or mystic gestures. One who rouses Kundalini is believed to be above the binding sense of Time, Space and Causation.

The Tantric texts insist that the occult power obtained by the rousing of Kundalini or by means of spells should not be used for evil purposes. The main object of rousing Kundalini is to enable a person to work out his or her own salvation.

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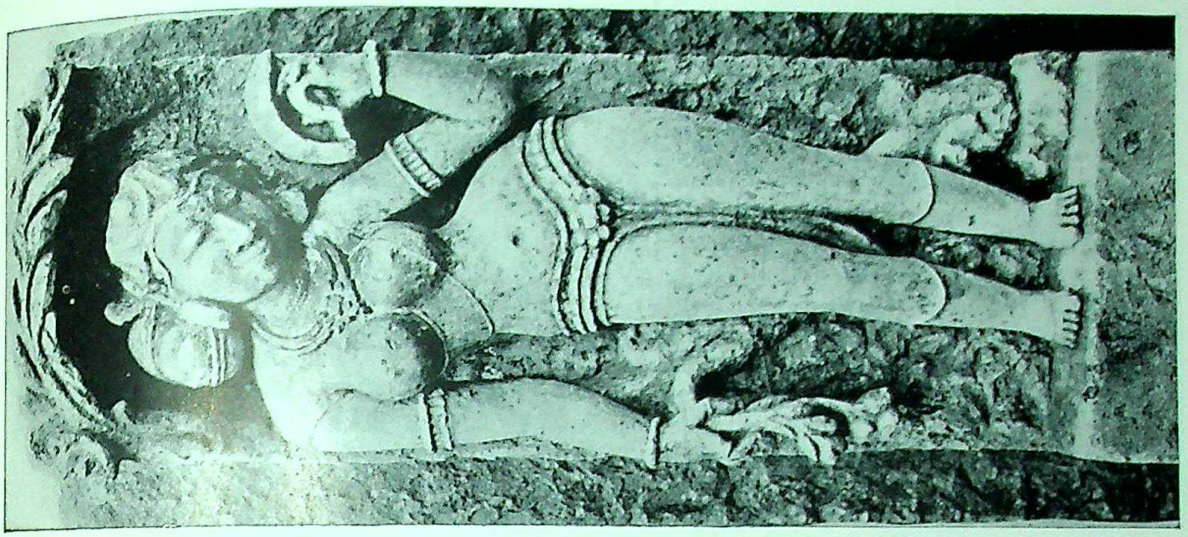

213 A GIRL WITH A MIRROR
Khiching, Mayurbhanj, Orissa : 11th Century A. D.
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212 KRISHNA AND GOPIS
Vellore Temple, 17th Century A. D.
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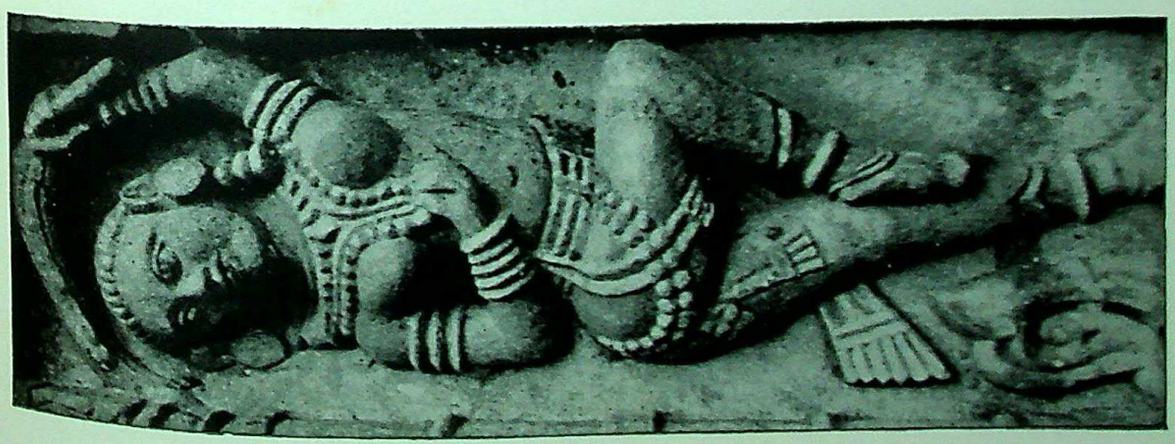

211 A DANCER
Vadnagar, N. Gujarat : 11th Century A. D.
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214 A GOPI WITH KRISHNA

Venugopala Temple, Srirangam, S. India : 16th Century A. D.

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215 LOVERS

Lingaraja Temple, Bhuvanesvar, Orissa : 10th Century A. D.

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216 KRISHNA

The love call on the flute, and the Gopis in rapture, Vijayanagar : 14th Century A. D.

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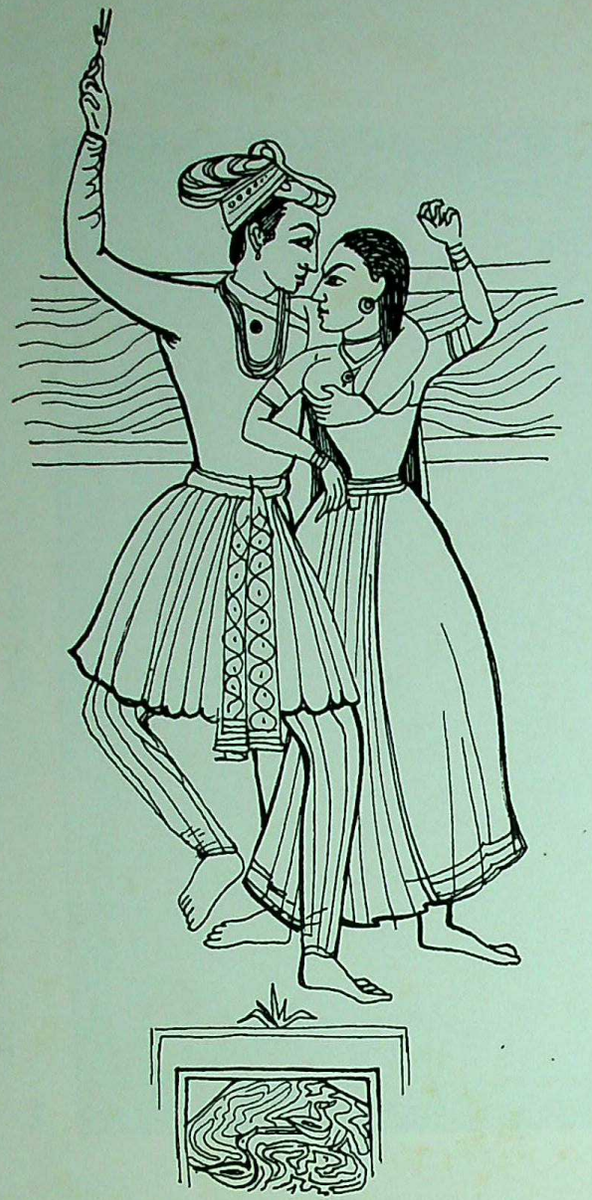
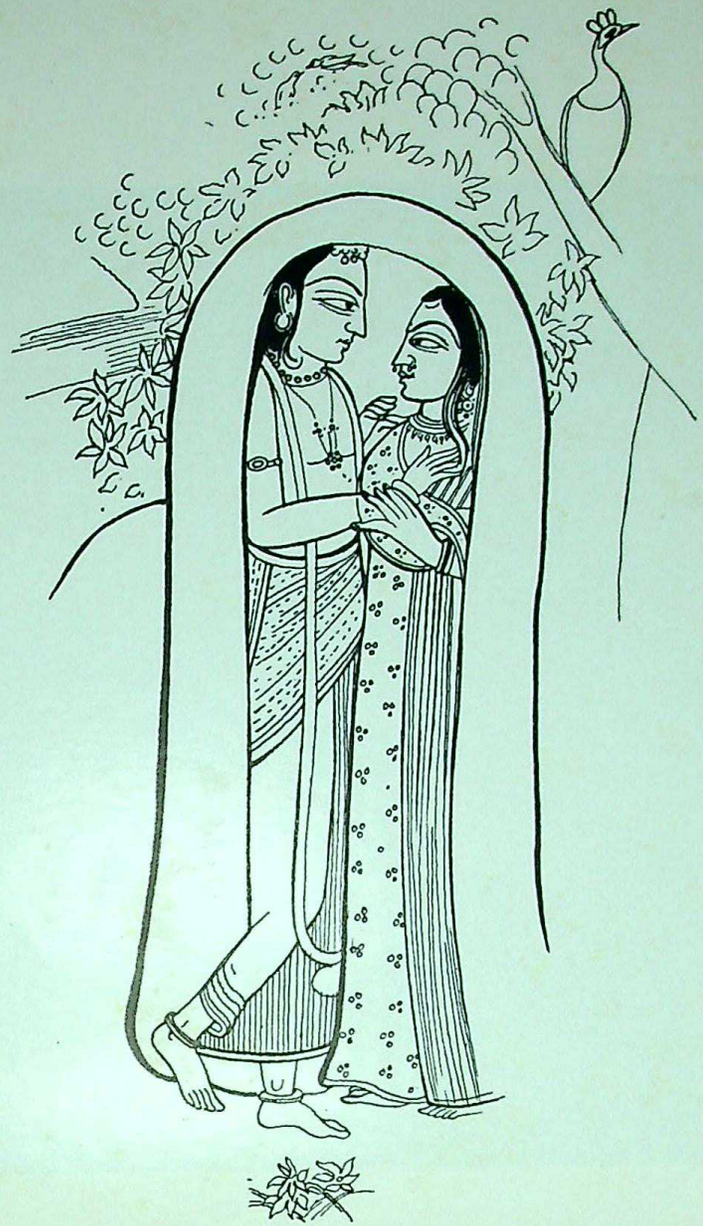


217 A PRINCE AND HIS LOVE
Mixed Rajput and Mogul style : 17th Century A. D.



218 RADHA AND KRISHNA AS THE DIVINE LOVERS OF THE GROTTO
Pahari, Kangra : 18th Century A. D.

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From the forgoing observations, it is clear that Tantric religion cannot be openly practised. Apart from the secret nature of Panchatatva worship which, for obvious reasons, cannot be publicly held, the old Hindu notion that knowledge made public loses its magical power is jealously applied to Tantric rites. The Kaulas maintain that open worship is meant only for the ignorant, and the elect always worship in secret. They speak of the Kaula system as noble and dignified like a high-born woman who displays her charms to her wedded husband in secret, while the Shaivas, Vaishnavas and Dakshinamargis who worship in public are likened to prostitutes who practise their trade in the streets. For ensuring the secrecy of the system, the Tantras declare that no Kaula should acknowledge his true sect in public. The Kaula goes about the world as a Vaishnava or Shaiva and publicly worship in the shrines of these sects, and in all social matters conform to the practices of the sect he openly professes. But he must always bear in mind that he is the favoured of the goddess and as such above the sect he has accepted as a social convenience. For the Kaula has a high opinion of himself and calls the followers of other persuasions Pasus or beasts not possessing the saving knowledge of the Kaula doctrine. He is, however, aware that Shaivas and Vaishnavas hold the Kaula rites up to ridicule; in some Shaiva works sarcastic mention of Tantric rites are found. But the Kaula is not perturbed by these jibes. For he holds that a certain amount of accumulated merit in previous births is necessary to give an individual a leaning towards the Kaula doctrine and where this is wanting, a man, far from being attracted by the Secret Doctrine, is likely to be repelled by it.

The origin of Kaula system is a much disputed subject. Hindus who do not believe in it maintain that it is foreign to Aryan conceptions, and found its way to Hinduism through Buddhistic influences. During the decadence of Buddhism in India, Tantric practices were fairly common among the Mahayana sect. Tara was the presiding goddess of Tantric rites among Indian Buddhists, and some of the monasteries where her worship was instituted degenerated into dens of secret vice. The northern hordes who invaded India and were converted to Buddhism had strange cults and their influence was quite marked in the Mahayana sect. It is probable that these northerners introduced Tantric cults into Indian Buddhism. In Tibet and among certain Central Asian Buddhists, Tantric practices are still common. The fact that the people of Assam and Bengal have a racial affinity to them and these two provinces are the greatest strongholds of Sakti cult at present lends considerable support to the theory of the northern origin of Tantric rites.

The Tantrics themselves, like all orthodox Hindu sects, trace the origin of their rites and doctrine to the *Vedas*. But their view of the order of importance of the *Vedas* is different from that of the other sects. They consider the *Atharva Veda* to be anterior and superior to Rig, Sama and Yajur, whereas the usually accepted order of priority is the reverse. The *Atharva Veda* contains much magic and many spells together with sound and elevating doctrines. Some of the passages of the *Atharva Veda* may, however, be mistaken for Tantric precepts. Here are a few spells from the *Atharva Veda* for making impotent men virile :

"Play the bull, blow, increase and spread ; let thy member increase limb by limb ; with it smite a woman.

"Wherewith they invigorate one who is lean, wherewith they incite one who is ill with that, O Brahmanaspati, make thou his member taught like a bow.

"I make thy member taught like a bow-string on a bow ; mount as it were a stag a doe, unrelaxingly always."*

* *Atharva Veda* VI. 5, ii, iii & iv.

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Since goddessses are mentioned in all the *Vedas* and hymns are addressed to them, the Tantrics do not find much difficulty in tracing the origin of their rites to the *Vedas* and considerably stretch the meaning of words so as to make them yield the desired sanction. The probabilities are that the magical rites mentioned in the *Atharva Veda* were elaborated into a system when the Hindu religious synthesis developed and Aryans assimilated the practices and beliefs of several non-Aryan peoples.

The Tantrics have a legend which explains the origin of the principal shrines of their cult. The story goes that Shiva after killing Daksha (see page 116) took the charred body of Sati in his hands and started wailing over it. He fell into a paroxysm of grief and, gone mad with emotion, started dancing with the body of Sati still in his hands. Such was the terrible rhythm of the dance that all the fourteen worlds trembled and all the creatures in them were about to perish. In this predicament the terror-stricken gods supplicated Vishnu, the preserver, to devise some means to save the universe from impending doom. Vishnu finding no other method of stopping Shiva's dance took his flaming discus and cut the body of Sati into fifty-one pieces, which falling from Shiva's hands, this god regained his senses and stopped dancing. The fifty-one pieces of Sati's body are believed to have fallen in different parts of the country, and a shrine sprung up over each piece. The Yoni is said to have fallen in Assam at the site where the Kamakhya temple stands at present, and Saktism is believed to have spread mainly from this place.

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Chapter Sixteen

LOVE AS GOD

Vishnu, as the preserver of the universe, has held a unique position in the Hindu pantheon even in the heyday of Shaiva greatness. But his worship was not so widespread in ancient India as that of Shiva or his consort. The greatness of Vishnu as a universal benefactor and the god of love and grace was first preached by Ramanuja, a South Indian Brahmin who lived in the 12th century of the Christian era. His disciple, Ramananda carried his message to the North, and soon the whole of India went through a vibrating change inspired by the new cult. From the close resemblance of Vaishnavism to Christian conceptions, it is even thought Ramanuja was influenced by the Christian communities of South India.*

The gist of Ramanuja's popular teaching is that God, represented by Vishnu and his incarnations, is essentially the personification of love and mercy ; and that the most effective way of approaching Him is through devotion and a humble heart and not through rituals, taboos or asceticism. Vishnu is a loving god and he is not the master of the devotee but his slave. One of Vishnu's many names is Bhaktadasa meaning the slave of the devotee. He cares not for caste or creed or what is offered to him but is concerned only with the heart of the devotee and the intensity of his devotion. In love with the devotee, the god forgets himself and becomes his friend, his companion, nay his servant. Rama, the seventh incarnation of Vishnu and hero of the epic *Ramayana* is the god of devotion in popular Vaishnavism. We are, however, more concerned here with Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Vishnu, who is the central figure in the love cults of Vaishnavas.

The all-absorbing devotion to god, when it reaches a certain stage, is apt to become an intoxication which to the ordinary run of mankind may appear a mania. The devotee in his ecstasy often forgets himself and the world around him. Drunk with love of the Lord, he is likely to behave in a manner objectionable to the respectable.

Sages with sufficient devotion experienced these mystic joys and some of them actually behaved in the manner described. Nothing could compare with this ecstasy and they could not describe their experience to others. But it was necessary that others should know the nature of this joy so that they too could become devotees of Vishnu and obtain liberation and bliss. In this predicament Vaishnava mystics gave utterance to their experience in terms of the greatest joy ordinary mortals are capable of understanding and experiencing. Now, there is no pleasure so eagerly sought after by men of the world as union with a beautiful, loving woman. Hence Vaishnava poets often uttered the unutterable in terms of sex love.

This divine love is denoted by the Sanskrit word Prema as distinguished from Kama or sensuous love. In common literature, however, the two words are indifferently used in both senses. Prema, in its true sense, stands for all-absorbing devotion to God which leads to spiritual intoxication. In Prema the distinction between the devotee and the Deity is often lost ; for it establishes complete equality or union between the two ; some advocates of Prema even maintain, as is stated already, that the deity becomes the slave of his devotee.

This sexual symbolism in devotion is not, however, peculiar to the Hindus. The Hebrew *Song of Songs*, the worship of Christ as the Divine Bridegroom by Christian mystics, and Sufism in Islam all indicate the same religious tendency. What is probably peculiar to the Hindus is their genius for pursuing an idea to its extreme end aided by a vivid

* For the influence of Christianity on Hinduism please see authors *Christians and Christianity in India and Pakistan* (Allen and Urwin).

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imagination. There is no restraint imposed on their passion for speculation either by themselves or by pontifical authority, and many sound principles are often stretched to undesirable extremes. The love cult of the Hindus is no exception to this general tendency, and we find many offshoots of the cult which may appear as objectionable as the Panchatatva ritual.

Just as Shiva is the deity of destruction and regeneration, Sakti of power, and Kama of sensous pleasure, Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Vishnu, is the god of spiritual love. Krishna appears to have been the tutelary god of some pastoral clan who came into prominence towards the tenth century of the Christian era. By the eleventh century the worship of Krishna was firmly established on the banks of the Jumna, and Vaishnavism having given a new interpretation to his activities, Krishna became the most popular god of the cult shadowing even the greatness of Rama. For Krishna is a god peculiarly suited to the genius of the common people. He does not preach asceticism as a means to salvation; on the contrary, for him the world is a playground and the universe is said to be the Lila or play of Krishna. His own life on earth, depicted in Hindu scriptures is so varied that every man has found in him a god after his own heart. In childhood he was the darling of the pastoral folk among whom he grew up, and to this day Hindus experience a unique joy in reading the poems describing the sweet pranks of the divine child; as a young man Krishna was the heart-ravisher of the young women of Braj where he lived and tended flock; reaching manhood he proved a strong warrior and wise statesman who organized his pastoral people, the Yadavas, into a powerful community of redoubtable fighters. To him is attributed the *Bhagavatgita* a philosophical gem, containing in a nutshell, the whole Hindu conception of life and liberation. Adherence to duty is the greatest virtue preached in *Bhagavatgita*, and Krishna is one of the few examples in Hinduism of an effective teacher who maintains that a well-lived worldly life is more noble than renunciation or asceticism.

Krishna in his youth is described as an attractive, gay person, slightly dark in complexion, possessing a well-proportioned body, an expert dancer and an incomparable fluteplayer. The young maidens of the village were in love with him. Even married women longed for him and loved to listen to the notes he played on the flute. The arcadian fields of Vrindavan, on the banks of the Jumna, were the haunts of young Krishna. At midnight in spring when the full moon shone and turned the blue waters of the Jumna into a silvery sheet, Krishna stole into the mango groves on the banks of the river and played on his flute. On hearing the call of the divine lover, the Gopis (as the woman of Vrindavan were called) leaving their husbands, parents and children ran to the grove in sheer delight and danced and sang with Krishna.

In marked contrast to the other deities of the pantheon like Shiva and Sakti who represent the imposing and the powerful, Krishna is depicted in art as a playful young man of pleasing countenance, musical, well-adorned with beautiful garments and ornamented head-dress. He is usually represented as standing with one leg gracefully bent and the foot resting on the other, playing on a flute, the rhythmic figure having something Hellenic about it. He is generally pictured as the central figure among a number of Gopis, or alone or with his favourite Gopi Radha.

The love of the Gopis for Krishna is symbolic of the intense devotion of the God-mad devotee. In his love for God, the devotee reaches a stage when no bonds, either of duty or mundane relationship can keep the soul from the Lord. The Gopis' desertion of their husbands and parents for the pleasure of union with the Lord illustrates the soul's yearning for God to the exclusion of all other sentiments. A certain contempt for the trivialities of social codes has always distinguished the true Vaishnava. St. Augustine's precept love God, and do what you like' aptly describes the Vaishnava's attitude towards

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ethics and morals. While this guide to conduct has worked well with those Vaishnavas whose love for God has been a guarantee against moral lapse, some so called followers of Vishnu have unfortunately tried to do what they liked without sufficient love for the Lord.

It must, however, be mentioned that the Hindus do not consider it debasing if a sensuous interpretation is given to the Gopis' love for Krishna. Sex is not particularly irreligious and if an erotic sentiment is mixed up with the devotional, far from seeing any harm, schools of Hindu thought consider it a legitimate method of union with God. Contemplation of Krishna from any angle is thought to be meritorious. The story is told of Shishupala, the bitter enemy of Krishna, who even in his sleep plotted to kill Krishna; because of this constant contemplation of Krishna, albeit in spite, Shishupala on his death went straight to heaven. Such being Hindu conceptions of devotion, it is not surprising that contemplation of Krishna as the hero of sensuous love should find a place in Vaishnavism. Some of the sects that worship Krishna have strong erotic leanings and their practices are condemned by others.

Like the Saktas, Vaishnavas of the Krishna cult insist on making religion as pleasant as possible. But in place of Panchatatva, Vaishnavas advocate salvation through song and dance. Singing Kirtans and dancing before idols is a peculiarity of all Vaishnava cults and many of the great saints of the sect gave expression to their devotion in song; Thyagaraja the famous South Indian musician-saint whose Kirtans in praise of Rama are considered masterpieces of classical music, and Jayadeva, the author of the famous *Gita Govinda*, a work which we will have to notice later, were notable examples. The Rajput lady Mirabai who left her palace and her husband in search of the Divine Lover was also a great songstress. Her ecstatic songs expressing eagerness to meet her Lover, her impatience on the delay of his coming, on the fulness of her heart on meeting him vibrate with divine passion and her name and songs are household words among North Indian Vaishnavas. Examples of sublime devotion will also be found in the works of Suradas, Tulasidas and Thukaram all well-known Vaishnava poets and musicians.

But all the songs of Krishna and the Gopis do not breathe sublime mysticism. In Bengal poems of mystic love often took a sensuous turn and in the works of Jayadeva and Vidyapathi, the descriptions of the love-scenes, quarrels and jealousies of Krishna and his beloved Radha are hardly distinguishable from similar poetry describing the love activities of ordinary mortals.

Dance is a most important feature of the Krishna cult. Chaitanya, the saint who popularised Vaishnavism in Bengal was an ardent advocate of the dance as expressive of devotion, and himself used to sing and dance before the idols of Krishna. Dance is in fact a common feature of all Hindu rituals irrespective of sectarian differences. Shiva is the arch-dancer of the pantheon and he is often worshipped by his followers as Nataraja or Lord of Dancers. The goddess Kali too dances after a triumph over her enemies. The dances of Shiva and Kali symbolize the rhythm in the universe or the terror-inspiring whirl of the worlds. Shiva usually dances solo; so does Kali. But the dances of the Krishna cult have a high sexual symbolism and Krishna seldom dances alone. He dances either with his favourite Gopi Radha or with a number of Gopis. One of the popular dances of Vaishnavas is known as Rasalila in which a number of Gopis dance each with her beloved Krishna, this god having multiplied himself for the purpose. Mathura, the stronghold of the Krishna cult, is the home of the dance, and it is organized on a large scale on festive occasions. Krishna is believed to have lived in his younger days in Mathura. During spring, in the temples dedicated to Krishna in Mathura festivals in memory of his midnight revelries with Gopis are still held for the pleasure of pilgrims. It is not however Mathura alone that is associated with the cult and the dance. Rasalila is a popular dance all over India. Women, however, do not take part in Rasalila, the part of the Gopis being

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played usually by boys dressed as women. If women organize the dance, then Krishna is represented by a girl dressed as man. The modern tendency, however, is towards mixed dances, and the professional exponents of Indian classical dancing invariably employ women to play the role of Gopis and men of Krishna and his multiples.

It is interesting to note that in the love cult Krishna is worshipped not with his legitimate wives but with his sweet-hearts before marriage, the young girls married and unmarried who grew up with him in Vrindavan where he lived and tended the flocks of the Gopas (cowherds) in his boyhood. The following description of Krishna's sport with the Gopis extracted from the *Vishnu Purana* will give the reader an adequate idea of the activities of the gay, youthful god :

"Beholding the clear sky with the autumnal moon, and the air perfumed with the fragrance of the wild water lily in whose buds the clustering bees were murmuring their songs, he (Krishna) felt inclined to join the women of the cow-herds in sport. Thereupon with Balarama (his half-brother) he began singing sweet low strains in various measures such as the women loved ; and they, as soon as they heard the music, left their homes and hastened to meet the Slayer of Madhu. One damsel gently sang an accompaniment to his song, another attentively listened to his music : one called him by the name and then shrank in bashfulness ; whilst another, more bold and prompted by love pressed close to his side ; one as she came out saw some of the seniors of her family and dared not venture farther than satisfying herself with meditating on Krishna with closed eyes and whole-hearted devotion by which immediately all sin was expiated by regret at not seeing him ; and others again reflecting upon the cause of the world, in the form of Supreme Brahma, obtained, by their sighing, final emancipation. Thus encircled by the females of the cow-heards, Krishna thought the lovely moon-light night of autumn suited to the Rasa dance."*

Krishna started dancing with the Gopis and when they were enjoying his company suddenly disappeared leaving them, as it were, in mid-air. The love-mad Gopis wandered all over the banks of the Jumna calling him by the name and crying pitifully. They could find him nowhere and in despair repaired to the spot where he had left them and started singing his songs. Then they saw "the protector of the three worlds with a smiling countenance coming speedily towards them, on which one cried out 'Krishna, Krishna', being unable to utter anything else. One liked to contract her forehead with frowns as if drinking with the bees of her eyes the lotus of Hari's face ; another shutting her eyes meditated upon his form. Thereupon Krishna coming amongst them conciliated some with soft words, some with gentle looks and some he took by the hand and sported in the stations of the dance. As each of the damsels attempted to remain close to Krishna, the circle of the dance could not be constructed. Thereupon taking each by the hand and when their eyelids were closed by the magic of his touch, Hari formed the circle. Then began the dance to the accompaniment of the music of clashing bracelets round the neck of Krishna : a girl proficient in the art of singing embraced him. The drops of perspiration from the arms of Hari were like fertilizing rain which produced drops of dew upon the temples of the damsels. Krishna sang the melody that was suited to the dance. The damsels cried 'Bravo ! Krishna !' as he sang. When leading they followed him, when retracing they met him ; whether he went forward or backward they always followed him. While thus sporting with him, they regarded one moment of his absence as a myriad of years. And although prohibited in vain by their husbands and brothers, they went out at night to sport with Krishna, the idol of their love. Thus the deity of unbounded prowess, the remover of all imperfections, assumed the character of a youth amongst the damsels of Braj, pervading their nature by his own essence like the wind ; for even as in

* Tr. M. N. Dutt.

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all creatures the elements of ether, fire, water, and air are comprehended, so also is he everywhere present and in all."

The *Vishnu Purana* was written when the cult was still in its infancy. Later the cult was elaborated, and Radha, one of the Gopis, was exalted to the position of the presiding goddess of the cult. She was the wife of the Gopa Ayanaghosha, but her husband has no place in the cult just as all the 16,008 legitimate wives of Krishna are as good as non-existent for purposes of worship in the sect. Radha was *the* beloved of Krishna and she alone is believed to adequately represent the passionate devotee ceaselessly seeking the lord. Her tortuous jealousies, her anxiety on her lover's absence, her pangs on his separation, are the favourite theme of song and dance among the Vaishnavas. Because of the unique position Radha occupies in the cult, it is also called the Radha Krishna cult.

The most popular Hindu work describing in terms of sexual love the soul's yearning for union with God, its despair, sorrows and anxiety in the absence of the Lord and its supreme joy in meeting the Lord is Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. It is a pastoral drama which has Radha for the heroine, and it is performed during religious festivals even at present. As it will give the reader an adequate conception of the nature and trend of the Radha Krishna cult, I shall give here a summary of the drama.

In the opening scene is introduced Radha, the jasmine-bosomed, reclining in a bower in the woodlands by the Jumna. It is spring, the season of love when the love-god Kama roves the woods with his bow of luscious cane and shafts of flowers. The love-lorn Radha is waiting for Krishna and becomes impatient of the delay in his arrival. The appointed hour is past and Radha becomes apprehensive of his loyalty. For Vrindavan is full of lovely maidens and Krishna is a sportive lad. Radha calls for her maid, and both go in search of Krishna.

Radha's worst fears are confirmed; for she sees Krishna sporting with the damsels of Vrindaban, heedless of his promise and forgetting Radha. The maid points to Krishna and tells Radha:

> See, lady! how thy Krishna passes these idle hours
> Decked forth in fold of woven gold, and crowned with forest-flowers;
> And scented with the sandal, and gay with gems of price
> Rubies to mate his laughing lips, and diamonds like his eyes;
> In the company of damsels who dance and sing and play.
> Lies Krishna, laughing, toying, dreaming his Spring away.*

Radha sees Krishna and the fair Gopis. One of these takes his head and gives for a pillow her heaving breasts 'tenderly outspread', and other girls fan him with the leaves and petals of roses. One lady leans over him and whispering sweet words of love in his ear kisses him and Krishna drawing her face to his returns the kiss; another feeling jealous of his reclining on the bosom of her rival, pulls him away by the cloth and tries to lead him to the shade of a spreading mango tree laden with blossoms. A third damsel stops him and starts dancing with him the Rasa measure to the delight of all.

Radha, burning with jealousy of her rival, thus laments her misfortune:

"Yes; in habiliments becoming the goddess of love and with tresses waving like flowery banners, a damsel more alluring than Radha enjoys the conqueror of Madhu. Her form is transfigured by the touch of her divine lover; her garlands quivers over her swelling bosom; her face like the moon is graced with clouds of dark hair, and trembles while she quaffs the nectarious dew of his lips; her bright ear-rings dance over her cheeks which they irradiate; and the small bells on her girdle tinkle as she moves. Bashful at first,

* Tr. Edwin Arnold.

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she smiles at length on her embracer, and expresses her joy with inarticulate murmurs, while she floats on the waves of desire, and closes her eyes dazzled with the blaze of approaching Kama : and now this heroine in love's warfare falls exhausted and vanquished by the resistless Murari, but alas ! in my bosom prevails the flame of jealousy, and yon moon, which dispels the sorrow of others, increases mine. See again, where the foe of Mura sports in yon grove on the bank of the Jumna. See, how he kisses the lip of my rival, and imprints on her forehead an ornament of pure musk, black as the young antelope on the lunar orb ! Now, like the husband of Rati, he fixes blossoms on her dark locks where they gleam like flashes of lightning among the coloured clouds. On her breasts, like two firmaments, he places a string of gems like a radiant constellation : he binds on her arms, graceful as the stalks of the water-lily, and adorned with hands glowing like the petals of its flower, a bracelet of saphires, which resemble a cluster of bees. Ah ! see, how he ties round her waist a rich girdle illumined with golden bells, which seem to laugh as they tinkle, at the inferior brightness of the leafy garlands which lovers hang on their bowers to propitiate the god of desire. He places her soft foot, as he reclines by her side, on his ardent bosom, and stains it with the ruddy hue of Yavaca. Say, my friend, why pass I my nights in this tangled forest without joy and without hope, while the faithless brother of Haladhera clasps my rival in his arms ?"

The distressed maid without uttering a word weeps for her mistress. Radha says:

"But why, my companion, shouldst thou mourn, though my perfidious lover has disappointed me ? What offence is it of thine if he sport with a crowd of damsels happier than I ? Mark, how my soul attracted by his irresistible charms bursts from its mortal frame and rushes to mix with its beloved. She whom the god enjoys, crowned with sylvan flowers sits carelessly on a bed of leaves with him whose wanton eyes resemble blue water-lilies agitated by the breeze. She feels no flame from the gales of Malaya with him whose words are sweeter than the water of life. She derides the shafts of soul-born Kama, with him, whose lips are like a red lotus in full bloom. She is cooled by the moon's dewy beams while she reclines with him whose feet and hands glow like vernal flowers. No female companion deludes her, while she sports with him whose vesture blazes like tried gold. She faints not through excess of passion while she caresses that youth who surpasses in beauty the inhabitants of all worlds. O gale, scented with sandal, who breathes love from the regions of the south, be propitious but for a moment : when thou hast brought my beloved before my eyes, thou mayest freely waft away my soul. Love, with eyes like blue water-lilies assails me and triumphs ; and while the perfidy of my beloved rends my heart, my female friend is my foe, the cool breeze scorches me like a flame, and the nectar-dropping moon is my poison. Bring disease and death, O gale of Malaya ! Seize my spirit, O god with five arrows* ! I ask not mercy from thee : no more will I dwell in the cottage of my father. Receive me in thy azure waves, O sister of Yama,† that the ardour of my heart may be allayed."‡

In despair Radha goes back to her bower and torn by anguish seriously contemplates suicide. But she cannot keep Krishna off her mind. With all that he had done her, with all his perfidy, Radha still wants him ; and wants him desperately too. As a last attempt to bring back the lover to her, Radha sends her maid to Krishna with a message of love.

The maid finds Krishna sitting alone and pensive on the river bank. The sport with the Gopis was over. Radha alone engrosses him now. Overburdened with a sense of guilt in having broken faith with Radha, Krishna wails :

Radha, Enchantress ! Radha, queen of all !
Gone lost, because she found me sinning here ;

* Kama, the love god.
† Yama is the god of death and Yamuna (the river Jumna) is said to be his sister.
‡ Tr. : Sir William Jones.

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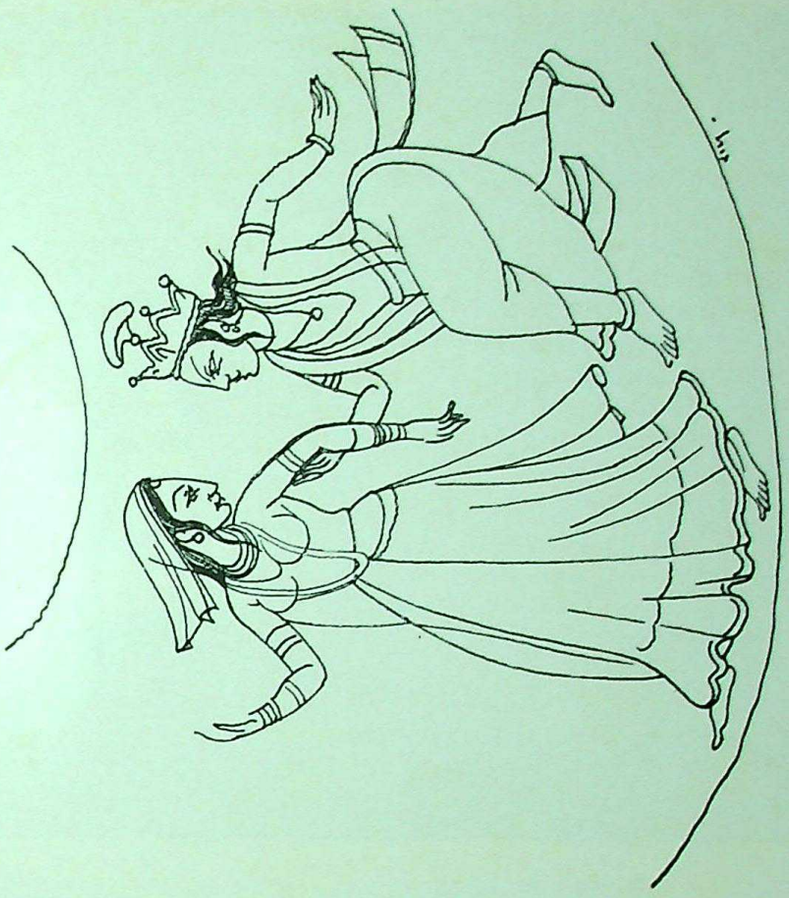
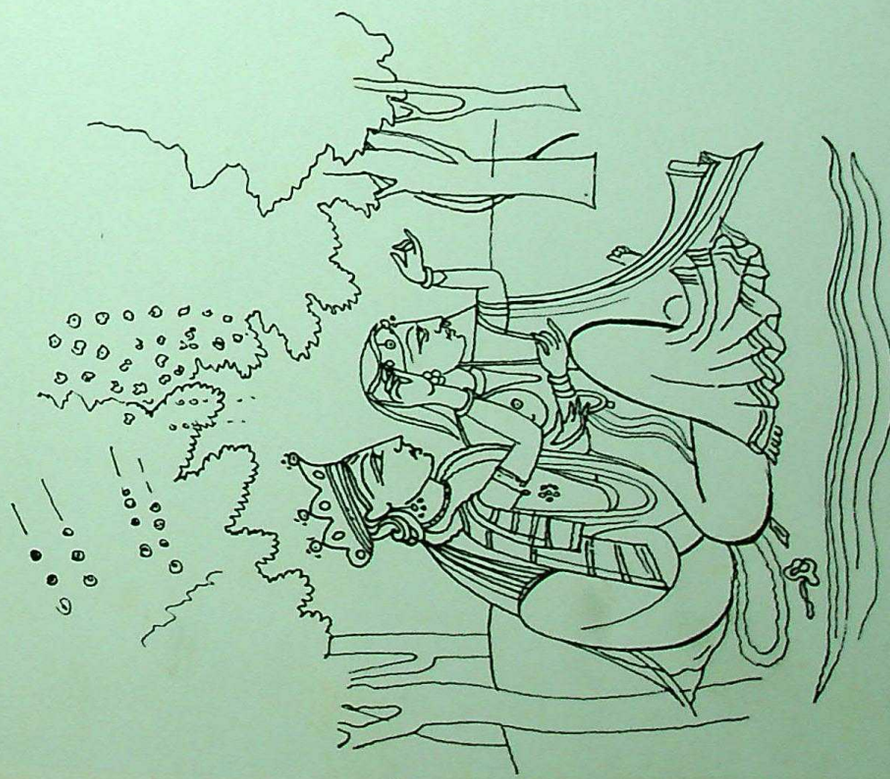


220 FLIRTATION
Radha and Krishna. From a Pahari painting : 18th Century A. D.



219 RADHA AND KRISHNA IN A GROVE BY THE JUMNA
From a Pahari painting : 18th Century A. D.

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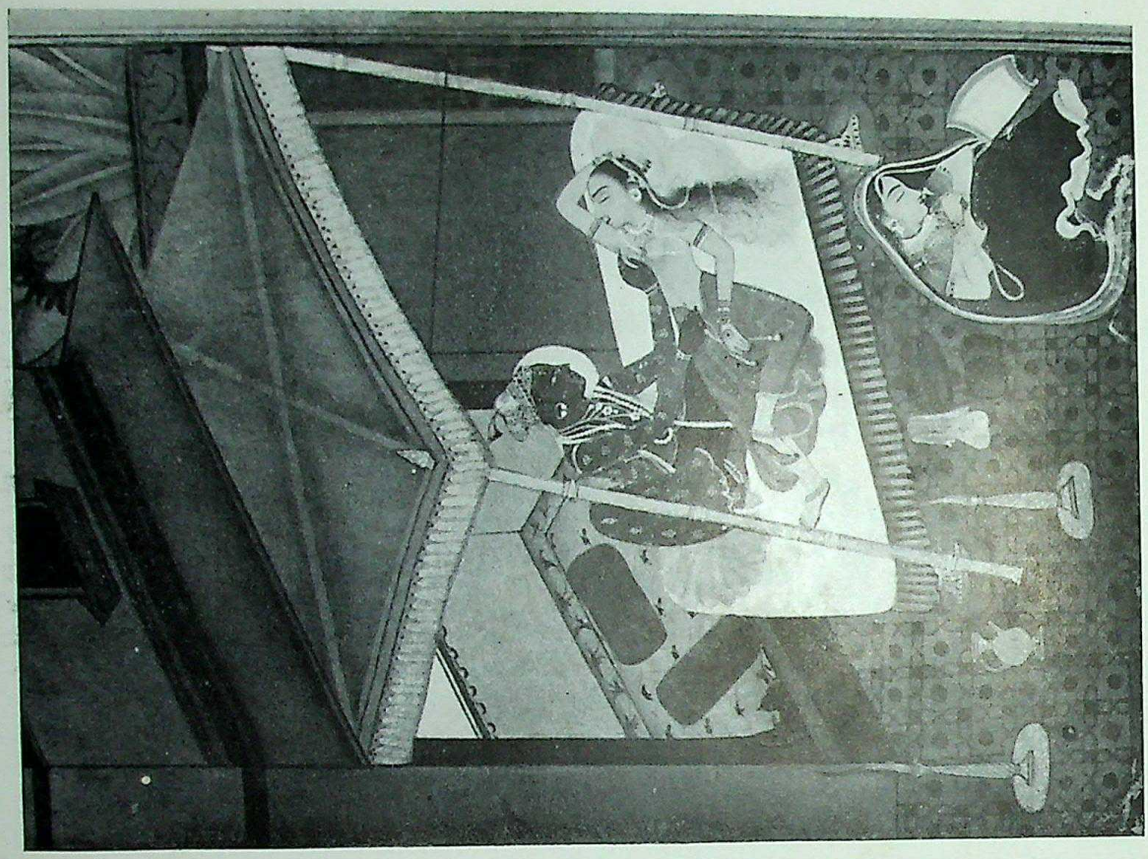
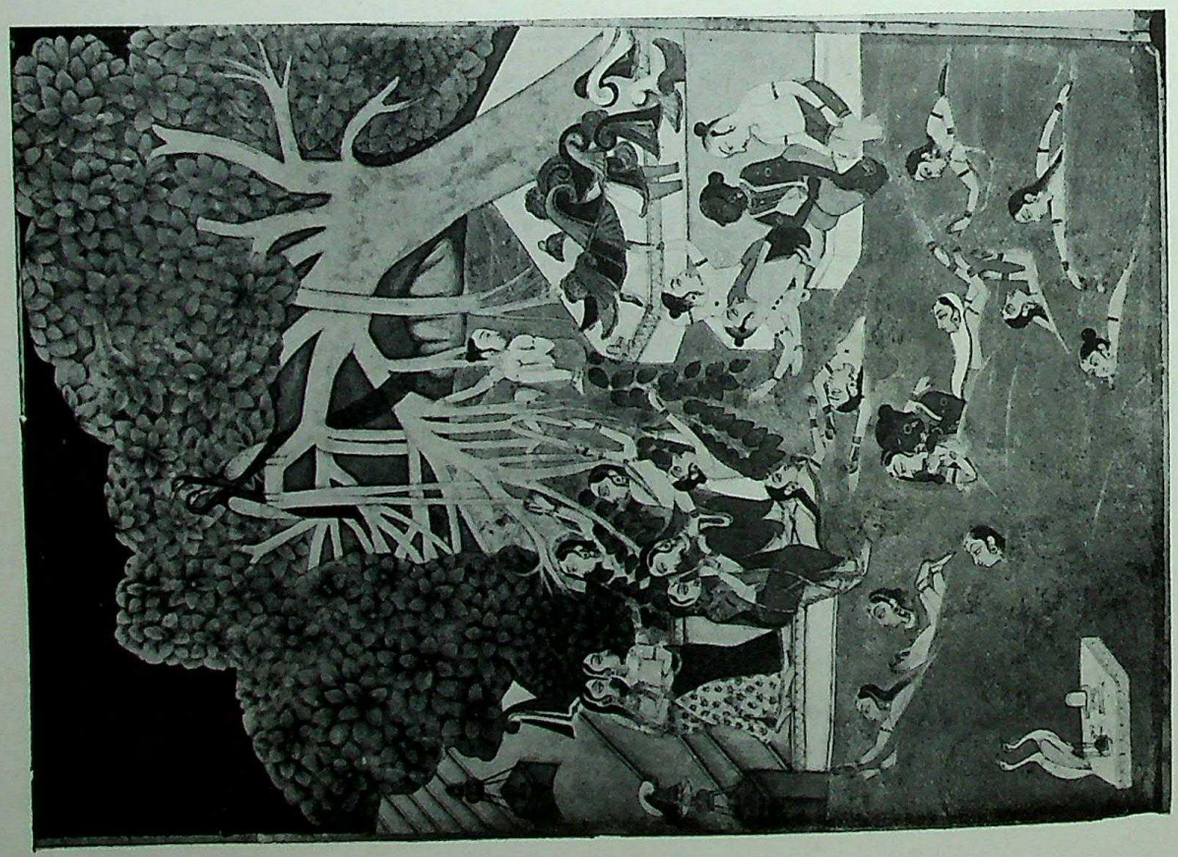


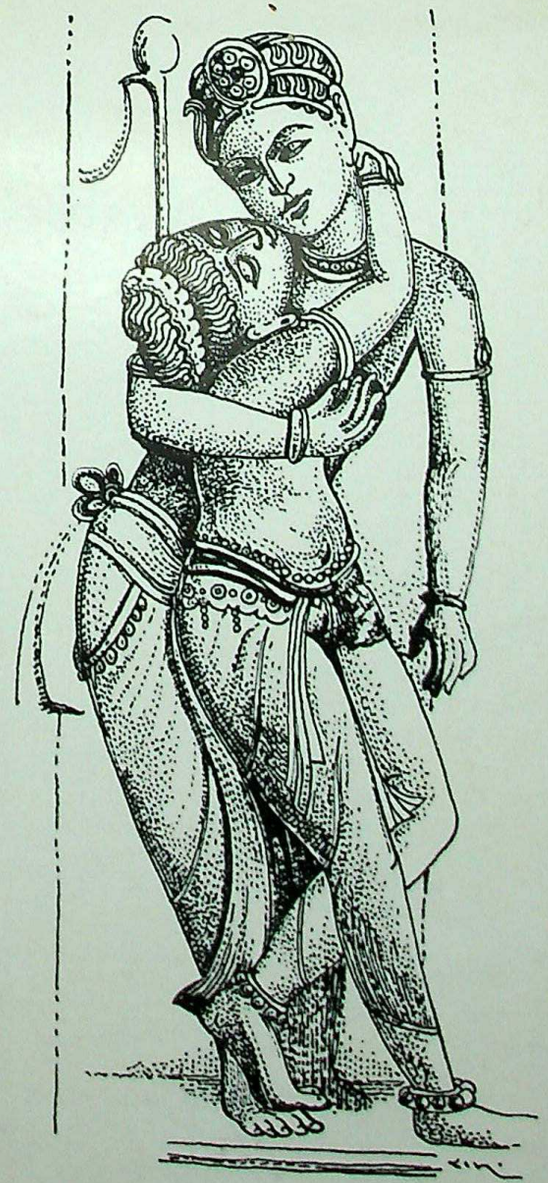
222 KRISHNA ON RADHA'S BED



221 WATER SPORT

Rajput School of painting: 18th Century

223 A BACCHANALIAN SCENE
Kushan Period, Mathura : 2nd Century A. D.



224 THE EMBRACE—MADHYA BHARAT STYLE
Sculptured doorway, Rajivalochana Temple :
8th Century A. D.

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And I so stricken with my foolish fall,
I could not stay her out of shame and fear ; She will not hear ;
In her disdain and grief vainly I call.

The maid approaches the wailing Krishna and tells him that Radha is dying for a sight of him. The news is too good to be believed. Moreover the guilty Krishna cannot make himself bold to face Radha. He begs the girl to go to Radha and tell her to come to him.

The maid, unable to persuade Krishna to go to Radha, returns to her mistress and tells her Krishna's plight. His conscience is stricken, she says, and the erring lad is unable to face her. Says the maid :

Yea, lady ! in the self-same spot he waits
Where with thy kiss thou taught'st him utmost love,
And drew him, as none else draws, with thy look ;
And all day long, and all night long, his cry
Is 'Radha, Radha', like a spell said o'er ;
And in his heart there lives no wish nor hope
Save only this, to slake his spirit's thirst
For Radha's love with Radha's lips ; and find
Peace on the immortal beauty of thy breast.

Radha is delighted to know that the Prodigal is longing to return home. But she would not go to him. Let the repentent sinner come to her and prove his sincerity ; there is a touch of vanity too in her demand. Besides,'the lotus seeks not the wandering bee, the bee must find the flower.' So Radha sends the maid back, asking her to bring Krishna with her.

The mission of the girl proves successful and Krishna comes to Radha. The proud lady, happy yet jealous, upbraids the foolish wanderer. With folded hands and bent knees Krishna begs for pardon. But Radha must have her say ; especially what she thought of the Gopi with whom he spent the night :

Krishna ! my Krishna with the woodland wreath !
Return, or I shall soften as I blame ;
The while thy very lips are dark to the teeth
With dye that from her lids and lashes came,
Left on the mouth I touched. Fair traitor ! go !
Say not they darkened, lacking food and sleep
Long waiting for my face ; I turn it—so
Go ! Ere I half believe thee, pleading deep ;
But wilt thou plead, when, like a love-verse printed
On the smooth polish of an emerald,
I see the marks she stamped, the kisses dinted
Large-lettered, by her lips? thy speech withheld
Speaks all too plainly ; go abide thy choice !
If thou dost stay, I shall more greatly grieve thee ;
Not records of her victory ?—peace, dear voice !
Hence with that doe-like brow, lest I believe thee.

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Radha goes on in this strain and Krishna interrupts :

"Speak but one mild word and the rays of thy sparkling teeth will dispel the gloom of my fears. My trembling lips, like thirsty Chakoras long to drink the moon-beams of thy cheek. O my darling, who are naturally so tender-hearted, abandon thy causeless indignation. At this moment the flame of desire consume my heart ; O grant me a draught of honey from the lotus of thy mouth. Or if thou beest inexorable, grant me death from the arrows of thy keen eye ; make thy arms my chain ; and punish me according to thy pleasure. Thou art my life ; thou art my ornament ; thou art a pearl in the ocean of my mortal birth : Oh ! be favourable now, and my heart shall eternally be grateful. Thine eyes, which nature formed like blue water-lilies, are become, through thy resentment like the petals of the crimson lotus : Oh ! tinge with their effulgence these my dark limbs, that they may glow like the shafts of Love tipped with flowers. Place on my head that foot like a fresh leaf, and shade me from the sun of my passion whose beams I am unable to bear. Spread a string of gems on those two soft globes ; let the golden bells of thy zone tinkle, and proclaim the mild edict of love. Say, O damsel with delicate speech, shall I dye red with the juice of alactaca those beautiful feet which will make the full-blown land lotus blush with shame ? Abandon thy doubts of my heart, now indeed fluttering through fear of thy displeasure, but hereafter to be fixed wholly on thee ; a heart which has no room in it for another : none else can enter it, but Love, the bodiless god. Let him wing his arrows ; let him wound me mortally ; decline not, O cruel, the pleasure of seeing me expire. Thy face is bright as the moon, though its beams drop the venom of maddening desire : let thy nectreous lip be the charmer, who alone has power to lull the serpent or supply an antidote for his poison. Thy silence afflicts me : Oh ! speak with voice of music, and let thy sweet accents allay my ardour. Abandon thy wrath, but abandon not a lover, who surpasses in beauty the sons of men, and who kneels before thee, O thou most beautiful among women. Thy lips are a Bandhujiva flower ; the lustre of the Madhuca beams on thy cheek ; thine eye outshines the blue lotus ; thy nose is a bud of the Tila ; the Chunda blossom yields to thy teeth : thus the flowery shafted god borrows from thee the points of his darts, and subdues the universe. Surely thou descendest from heaven, O slender damsel, attended by a company of youthful goddesses ; and all their beauties are collected in thee."

Radha, half-pacified, tenderly reproaches him more through self-pity than anger :

"Alas ! alas ! Go, Madhava, depart, O Kesava ; speak not the language of guile ; follow her, O lotus-eyed god, follow her who dispels thy care. Look at his eye half-opened, with continued waking through the pleasurable night, yet smiling still with affections for my rival ! Thy teeth, O cerulean youth, are azure as thy complexion from the kisses, which thou hast imprinted on the beautiful eyes of thy darling graced with dark blue powder ; and thy limbs marked with punctures in love's warfare*, exhibit a letter of conquest, written on polished saphires with liquid gold. That broad bosom stained by the bright lotus of her feet, displays a vesture of ruddy leaves over the tree of thy heart, which trembles within it. Ah ! how canst thou assert, that we are one, since our sensations differ thus widely ? Thy soul, O dark-limbed god, shows its blackness externally. How couldst thou deceive a girl, who relied on thee ; a girl who burned the fever of love ? Thou rovest in woods, and females are thy prey : what wonder ? Even thy childish heart was malignant ; and thou gavest death to the nurse who would have given thee milk.† Since thy tenderness for me, of which these forests used to talk, has now vanished, and since thy breast, reddened by the feet of my rival, glows as if thy ardent passion for her were

* Nail and teeth marks.

† The reference is to the destruction of Putana, a female fiend sent by Krishna's enemy Kansa for the destruction of the divine child. While she was giving him suck, the baby Krishna killed her by sucking her breasts hard.

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bursting from it, the sight of thee, O Deceiver, makes me (ah! must I say it?) blush at my own affection."

Radha, relentlessly pursues the guilty Krishna in this fashion, and the maid comes to the rescue of the persecuted lover. She asks Radha to forget and to forgive:

The lesson that thy faithful love has taught him
He has heard;

The wind of spring, obeying thee, hath brought him
At thy word:

What joy in all the three worlds was so precious
To thy mind?

My proud one! do not indulge in scorn,
Ah, be kind.

The words of the maid were not without avail and the lovers were reconciled. The maids of Radha's train now appear on the scene and the drama closes with a wedding song. To the music of the marriage song Radha enters the bridal chamber.

Then she, no more delaying, straight,
Her step a little faltered, but her face
Shone with unutterable quick love; and—while
The music of her bangles passed the porch—
Shame which had lingered in her downcast eyes,
Departed shamed.....and like the mighty deep,
Which sees the moon and rises, all his life
Uprose to drink her beams.

Jayadeva is well aware that his song of divine love is capable of being misinterpreted in a mundane sense. Hence he tells us:

And this shadowed earthly love
In the twilight of the grove,
Dance and song and soft caresses,
Meeting looks and tangled tresses,
Jayadev the same hath writ
That ye might have gain of it,
Sagely its deep sense conceiving
And its inner light believing;
How that Love—the mighty Master,
Lord of all the stars that cluster
In the sky, swiftest and slowest,
Lord of the highest, Lord of the lowest—
Manifests himself to mortals,
Winning them towards the portals
Of his secret House, the gates
Of that bright Paradise which waits
The wise in love. Ah, human creatures!

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Even your phantasies are teachers.
Mighty love makes sweet in seeming
Even Krishna's woodland dreaming ;
Mighty love sways all alike
From self to selflessness. Oh ! strike
From your eyes the veil, and see
What Love willeth Him to be
Who in error, but in grace,
Sitteth with that lotus-face,
And those eyes whose rays of heaven
Unto phantom-eyes are given ;
Holding feasts of foolish mirth
With these visions of the earth ;
Learning love, and love imparting
Yet with sense of loss upstarting :—
For the cloud that veils the mountains
Underneath the Sandal mountains,
How—as if the sunshine drew
All its being to the blue—
It takes flight, and seeks to rise
High into the surer skies,
High into the snow and frost,
On the shining summits lost !*

Such the inner meaning of this apparently lascivious song. The cult of Prema, like most other Hindu conceptions, has a gross as well as sublime aspect. Some of the sects have definite erotic leanings and their practices have been the target of attack by Hindus of other persuasions. One of such sects that obtained country-wide publicity is the Vallabha or Maharajah Vaishnavas. The sect was founded by Vallabha a Telinga Brahmin born in 1470. Such was his religious precocity that at the age of 12 he preached a new cult. He traversed India twice visiting all important centres of pilgrimage. He was an ardent Vaishnava and popularised the worship of Balgopal or the child Krishna. A pugnacious disputant, he was acclaimed as the greatest exponent of the Vaishnava school of thought by the then king of Vijaynagar.

Vallabha settled down in Benares and married. He had two sons. Marriage and sons did not, however, bring peace to his vigorously active soul and at the age of 52 he became an ascetic ; shortly after he died.

Though Vallabha died an ascetic, he was an advocate of what is known as Pushti Marga or the path of comfort. The burden of Vallabha's philosophy is that since man and God is but one, the needs of the flesh are not essentially different from the needs of the spirit. Probably the belief of the Kaulas that religion should be made pleasant to the degenerate people of Kaliyuga underlies the philosophy of Vallabha too. The goal of life, according to Vallabha, is the service of Krishna and the imitation of his sportive life.

* Tr. : Edwin Arnold.

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The distinctive feature of the Vallabha sect is the extraordinary reverence and homage paid to the heads of the community called Maharajahs (great kings) who are descendents of Vallabha ; hence the other name of the sect (Maharajah sect). The Maharajah, for the laymen and women of the sect is not merely the representative of Krishna but Krishna himself. The initiation ceremony of the sect is the Samarpana or absolute dedication of the member to the Maharajah in the role of Krishna. The initiate is to take this solemn oath during the ceremony :

"Om. Krishna is my refuge. I who suffer the infinite pain and torment of enduring for a thousand years separation from Krishna, consecrate to Krishna my body, senses, life, heart and faculties, my wife, house, family, property and my own self. I am thy slave, O Krishna."

The dedication is harmless in principle and is characteristic of Vaishnavism in general which enjoins the absolute abandon of the individual to the deity. But some of the practices of the Vallabha sect have led to much criticism. The Rasalila dance is a favourite ritual of the sect, the Maharajah dancing the role of Krishna and his female devotees those of the Gopis. Another feature of the extraordinary reverence paid to the Maharajah is the drinking of the water in which the Maharajah's feet have been washed.*

Towards the latter half of the nineteenth century when Hinduism assimilating modern ideas started its regeneration, the sect of Maharajah came in for much criticism. The editor of a paper made a vigorous attack on the sect in general and one of the Maharajahs in particular and this dignitary brought an action for libel in the High Court of Bombay in 1862. The proceedings created a sensation all over the country and much dirty linen was washed in public. In the end the defendants proved, to the satisfaction of the court that the charges were real and not imaginary and the action was dismissed with costs. This decision caused much sorrow to the sect, but the power of the Maharajahs did not abate on that account. An exerpt from the judgement may be reproduced here indicating what a British judge of the High Court (Sir Mathew Sausse) thought of the practices of the sect :

"The Maharajahs have been sedulous in identifying themselves with the god Krishna by means of their own writings and teachings and by similarity of ceremonies of worship and address which they require to be offered to themselves by their followers. All songs connected with the worship of Krishna, which were brought before us, were of an amorous character, and it appeared that songs of a corrupting and licentious tendency, both in ideas and expressions, are sung by young females to the Maharajah upon festive occasions, in which they are identified with the god in his most licentious aspect. In these songs as well as stories both written and traditional, which latter are treated of a religious character in the sect, the subject of sexual intercourse is most prominent. Adultery is made familiar to the minds of all ; it is nowhere discouraged or denounced ; but on the contrary, in some stories, those persons who have committed that great moral and social offence are commended."

With due deference to the moral sternness of a nineteenth century British judge, it must be mentioned that singing of lascivious songs is not sufficient proof of moral lapse in a Maharajah. A Vaishnava saint may sing apparently lascivious song with as much mental calm as a Christian divine may read the *Song of Songs*. In fact it is one of the peculiarities of Hinduism that saints often sing lascivious songs and professional dancers of disrepute sublime songs of devotion.

* The feet of the Guru or spiritual preceptor are very holy to the Hindu. St. Paul subscribed to this oriental sentiment when he said that he had studied at the feet of Gamaliel. Kissing the feet of the Guru, washing them, touching them and raising the hands so touched to the head, are all acts of reverence. Men of spiritual fame are sought after by the Hindus, and the water in which their feet are washed is at times drunk by the pious.

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The Maharajahs are, after all, spiritual preceptors or Gurus and it is seldom that a Guru abuses the confidence and trust of his followers. Besides, the disciples themselves will very soon lose respect for a Guru who is carnally inclined.

It is wrong to condemn the Maharajahs as lax in morals. It is of course probable that some of the Maharajahs did not live up to the spiritual standard expected of men of their eminence ; but most of them are venerable individuals enjoying the allegiance and confidence of a large number of educated, wealthy, cultured men and women. Further, from the practices of the sect one is inclined to believe that the Maharajahs assume an attitude of spiritual inaccessibility to their followers and promiscuous activities are not at all helpful in maintaining this aloofness. It may also be mentioned that access to the Maharajah is considered spiritually elevating and only the elect are permitted the privilege of approaching or touching the Maharajah.

There are at present over a hundred Maharajahs all of whom claim descent from Gukulnathji, the fourth son of Vithalnath. Vithalnath was the son of Vallabha and on him descended the authority of his father. He was, like his illustrious father, a brilliant exponent of Vaishnavism. He resided in Gokul (Muttra) and was called Gokul Gosain, the latter word being a corruption of Goswamin (lord of cattle) an epithet of Krishna.

A good many of Maharajahs live at Muttra but they have the greatest following among the mercantile communities of Rajputana and Gujerat. The Maharajah of Nat Dwara in Rajputana is a powerful dignitary in the cult and is acclaimed the chief of the Maharajahs. The temple of Nat Dwara is believed to be the real abode of Krishna, this god having migrated from Muttra when the Muslim persecution of the city became intolerable for gods. The idol of the main temple of Muttra was smuggled to Rajputana and invested at Nat Dwara during those days of distress.

It may be mentioned that Swami Narayana, a Vaishnava Brahmin born in 1780, tried to bring about some reforms among the followers of Vallabha. But he was persecuted and could not undermine the authority of the Maharajahs ; all that he could do was to found a sub-sect called Swaminarayana sect which has nothing erotic in its teachings.

A sect that has much in common with the Maharajahs is the Radha Vallabhi founded by Harivamsa in the sixteenth century of the Christian era. The members of this sect give pre-eminence to Radha. "Some scholars are of opinion that they have nothing to do with Vallabha and are an independent sect to whom the misnomer Radha Vallabhi had been attached. Whatever their origin and name, their practices have, like those of the Maharajahs, a strong erotic leaning. In their secret dances men have to dress as women. They maintain that Godhead is essentially male and this world of illusion and all its creatures are female. The only true male is Krishna and until a man identifies himself as a woman, he cannot enjoy the bliss of communion with Krishna."

Another peculiar sect of Vaishnavas that came into some prominence some hundred years ago is the Sakhi Bhava. "Its members are taught to regard themselves as Sakhis or the female companions of Radha, and in order to approach that character to the utmost extent possible, some of the Sakhi Bhavas went the length of assuming the female dress and wearing ornaments. They also feigned some physical conditions which are possible only to women."*

* *Hindu Castes and Sects*, J. N. Bhattacharya.

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Chapter Seventeen

TEMPLE ART, DEVADASIS AND BACCHANALIAN FESTIVALS

In all archaic religions occasional promiscuity formed part of public worship. The phenomenon of reproduction and the precedent sex activity led the ancients to believe in the efficacy of promiscuity as a fertilizing agent of their fields. Spring and autumn, the seasons during which the verdent earth puts on a vestment of gaity and the animal and vegetable kingdoms are at their best, were particularly selected for celebration of festivals connected with the principles of regeneration. In ancient Babylon, Egypt and Greece there were temples dedicated to gods and goddesses of reproduction, and during the spring festivals in these temples the ordinary morality of the society was given up in favour of licentious behaviour for the pleasure of the deities. Hinduism is coeval with the religions of Babylon, Egypt and Greece though it has survived them. Many of the goddesses of the Babylonian, Egyptian and Greek pantheon may still be found in Hinduism though known under different names.

The ruins of the temples of North India show that the practice of sex cults were prevalent in many of them. In almost all the great temples that have survived the ravages of middle ages the decorative art consists of erotic sculptures. Some of these show coital postures illustrative of Vatsyayana's treatise on the subject ; a few even depict perverted practices and the sex activities of animals and birds. The great temple of Konarak, now in ruins, was particularly noted for its erotic sculptures. The temple was dedicated to Surya the sun god. Sun temples are now few in India, but at one time his worship was fairly widespread ; and a characteristic feature of the architecture of temples dedicated to the sun god is the erotic sculptures that form part of the decorative art.

In Vedic literature Surya appears as a chaste god, the bright and beneficient luminary he is. In the Puranic pantheon he has, however, fallen from the high moral plane of the Vedic period and in some of the *Puranas* may be found stories of his moral lapses. We have already noticed the story of his seduction of the fair maid Pritha and the circumtances which made her expose her first-born. In another myth we are told that the sun god mated with a mare, and in a third that he and Varuna jointly produced on the celestial dancer Urvasi the sage Agastya.

It is not, however, the sun god alone who delights in erotic art. The famous temple of Jagannath in Orissa, the Khajuraho temples, and most of the imposing shrines of South India have erotic carving as forming part of decorative art. Apart from the fascination the mystic has always had for sex, the Hindu sculptor seems to have found in Maithuna (sexual union) an interesting motif. It is a peculiarity of the erotic sculptures of the temples that they appear mainly on the outer shrines and not on the inner. This circumstance has led some writers to believe that the idea emphasized is that the worshipper should be able to give free vent to his imagination outside the shrine and cast away all lascivious thoughts before entering it. This is a modern interpretation inspired by the Western notion of the indecency of sex, and it is doubtful if this was the real intention of the builders of the temple. The Hindus, as we have already seen, do not consider sex as something outside the province of religion, but on the contrary emphasize the importance of sex force in all their religious conceptions. As such its universality and greatness are probably indicated to the worshipper by means of art.

An objectionable institution associated with temple worship was Devadasi (slave of the god) which had been flourishing in all parts of the country till recently. We have seen in a previous chapter that Hindu kings used to keep in their palaces numerous courtesans for pomp and for pleasure. Kings were after all, humans and it was but proper that gods should have greater pleasures and privileges. For the medieval Hindu an idol was

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not a mere representation of a god, but the god himself in person and the idol was believed to have most of the needs of humans. Hence in public and private worship idols were bathed, anointed with perfumes, fed and clothed. They had other needs too.

The Devadasis were either courtesans bought by the temple trustees or children dedicated and given to the temple by some pious parents in keeping with some vow, and brought up by the priests.

The ostentatious duty of a Devadasi was to sing and dance before idols at regular intervals. Fanning the idol, leading the procession when idols were taken out on ceremonial occasions, etc. were the special privileges of the Devadasis ; in fact in all temple ceremonials and pageantry imitating royalty they played an important role. For these services they were paid by the temple either in cash or by endowments of lands.

This was not, however, the only source of income for the Devadasis. Most of them were no better than common courtesans and they plied their trade in their establishments which were situated not far from the temple itself. Pilgrims and sight-seers who visited shrines in large numbers during festivals often diverted themselves in these establishments.

To appreciate this point fully, the reader must bear in mind that a temple was not exclusively a place of worship. Much of the social and political life of the community, especially in villages and small towns centred round the temple. Social functions, political discussions and even business transactions often took place in the temple. To the temple was attached theatres, halls for discussion of religious and philosophical matters and for the meeting of the Panchayats for settling municipal affairs. It is not surprising then that in medieval India courtesans too got themselves attached to some temples.

Some of the priests of the temples were not above exploiting public credulity in the matter of recruiting Devadasis for the gods. The Abbe Dubois mentions a peculiar custom by which the Vaishnava idol of Tirupati recruited women for his seraglio :

"While the image of Venkatesvara is borne through the streets on a magnificent car, the Brahmins who preside at the ceremony go about the crowd and select the most beautiful women they can find, demanding them of their husbands or parents in the name of Venkatesvara for whose service, it is asserted they are destined. Those husbands who have not lost all common sense, understanding or at least suspecting that a god of stone has no need for wives indignantly refuse to deliver up theirs, and bluntly speak their mind to the hypocritical rogues. The latter far from being disconcerted, proceed to apply to others who are better disposed, for some of the men are delighted at the honour conferred upon them by so great a god in condescending to ally himself with their family and do not hesitate to deliver their wives and even their daughters into the hands of the priests.

"It is thus that seraglio of Tirupati is recruited. When the god takes it into his head that some of his wives are beginning to grow old or are no longer pleasing to him he signifies through the priests his intention of divorcing them. A mark is branded on their thighs or breasts with a red-hot iron, representing the god Venkatesvara, and they receive a certificate showing that they have faithfully served a certain number of years as legitimate wives of the god, and are therefore recommended to the charitable public. Then they are dismissed, and provided with their certificates of good conduct they go about the country under the name of Kaliyuga Lakshmis (Lakshmis* of Kaliyuga). Wherever they go their wants are abundantly supplied."

It need hardly be said that the institution, if it ever existed, has fallen intodisrepute. At present a Brahmin who goes to respectable pilgrims begging for wives for Venkatesvara will do so at the risk of his life.

* Lakshmi is the wife of Vishnu ; Venkatesvara is a name of this god.

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The institution of Devadasi was popular in medieval India and some of the larger temples had hundreds of these women attached to them. The famous temple of Somnath which Mahmud of Ghazni destroyed had more than five hundred Devadasis in it. The temple of Jagannath in Orissa also harboured a large number of Devadasis.

At what precise date the institution was introduced as part of temple ceremonial cannot be ascertained with accuracy. The absence of its mention in ancient literature shows that it originated in medieval times. The *Artha Sastra* of Kautilya, comprehensive in all respects, does not mention temple dancers. The book lays down elaborate instructions for the control of prostitution in the city and in the palace but does not refer to Devadasis or prostitutes in the temple.

The growth of Puranic religion brought the institution to the forefront. "Several *Puranas* recommend that arrangements should be made to enlist the services of singing girls to provide vocal and instrumental music at the time of divine services. These singing girls were usually prostitutes, and we are pained to find that some of the *Puranas* should have gone to the extent of recommending the purchase of beautiful girls for their dedication to temples. One *Purana** goes to the extent of saying that the best way to win Suryaloka (the heaven of the sun god) is to dedicate a bevy of prostitutes to a solar temple."†

The solar temples were notorious for Devadasis. Huien Tsang who visited India in the seventh century of the Christian era observes that he saw a large number of dancing girls in the sun temple at Multan. In fact the main attraction of the sun temples seems to have been their erotic art and the Devadasis. And it is creditable to the moral sense of the Hindus that few living temples of Surya exist in India at present.

The institution of Devadasi came in for a good measure of criticism by right-minded Hindus from very early times. The Muslim traveller Alberuni says that there was vehement opposition to the institution from a section of Hindus but kings and nobles being in favour of it, the efforts of the opposing section to abolish the institution proved of no avail. "A 10th century inscription from Rajputana confirms the statement of Alberuni. It records the express instructions of a chieftain to his attendants that if the arrangement he had made about the services of dancing girls at different temples was interfered with by ascetics and Brahmins, they should atonce be stopped.'‡ It is probable that Kings and nobles derived as much pleasure from the Devadasis as the temple trustees and their gods, and hence the zeal of Puritanic sects were unavailing against the powerful combination.

The contact with the British and the modern conceptions of religion have considerably influenced public opinion in the matter and at present few Hindus of the better class will be found to uphold the institution. In fact with the rise of modernism a vigorous crusade against Devadasis was launched all over the country and as a result the institution was legally stopped in the Madras Presidency where the evil had assumed alarming proportions. Legal prohibition does not, however, mean the annihilation of the institution for priests and temple trustees have many subtle ways of retaining Devadasis under respectable pretexts. The most salutary factor in the matter is enlightened public opinion, and this is so much against the institution that few temples anywhere in India openly retains Devadasis at present.

Coming to the subject of Bacchanalian festivals, it is good to remember that a certain amount of rowdyism and license is a common feature of festivals of every community in the world. When the occasion indicates excessive hilarity, drinking is usually indulged in and public rejoicings often burst forth into bad language and even violence.

* *Padmapurana.* † *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation*, A. S. Altekar. ‡ Ibid.

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Song, dance and noise play an important part in all Hindu festivities, and some of these have their origin in the fertility cults of primitive tribes. By far the most important Hindu festival in which the Bacchanalian element is predominant is the Holi. It is a spring festival which has for its presiding deities Krishna and Kama, the love gods of the pantheon. It is obvious that a festival in honour of the divine lovers cannot but have some sexual significane. The Holi falls in the 15th of the Hindu month of Phalgun, corresponding to February-March, and is eminently suited to the genius of the mob and the folk.

One of the important items of Holi celebration is the bonfire that is lit in the evening and kept burning for the whole night. The bonfire is symbolic of the cremation of Winter and the birth of the joyous Spring. According to popular beliefs the bonfire indicates the destruction and cremation of the female fiend Putana who was killed by Krishna. Some Hindu scriptures, on the other hand, maintain that Shiva is the presiding deity of the festival and the bonfire symbolizes the destruction by this god of a female demon named Holika. Whoever the victim of the symbolic bonfire, it is considered meritorious to abuse her on the occasion of her cremation, and those who take part in the festivities use vulgar language against the dead fiend.

In keeping with the expectation of the spring season which would shortly clothe the earth with flowers and plants of variegated colours, the Holi is celebrated as a festival of colours. During this festival Indian villages, towns and cities present a unique spectacle. Rich and poor, the respectable and rowdy, all besmear their clothes and faces with red, green and yellow powder and paste. Holi players collect in groups at street corners armed with packets of coloured powder, and forcibly besmear the clothes of passers-by who happen to wear clean clothes. Children take great delight in thus humiliating the respectable. With syringes and bottles of coloured water they waylay pedestrians, demand 'Baksheesh' and threaten colourful confusion in the event of non-payment.

Because of the infectious nature of all rowdyism, even Members of Muslim, Parsi and Christian communities join the fun. Sometimes, however, forcing members of other communities to take part in the festival leads to communal riots.

Hindu women in their own houses 'play Holi' by sprinkling coloured water among themselves or on near male relatives. It is permissible to fool the elderly and the respectable on this day. Something of the spirit of April 1st, is a feature of the Holi. Respectable women, however, strictly keep to their houses and do not move out of doors, for obvious reasons.

The cult of the vulgar is often pushed to extremes by drunken merry-makers. The abuse on Putana, Holika or whoever the fiend might be, is extended to persons who have absolutely no connection with this enemy of the gods.

In South India where the religion of the lower classes has something primitive about it, festivals in honour of goddesses are often marked by obscene language. The present writer had, some years back, occasion to witness the celebrations of the Bharani festival of Malabar. This festival is held in honour of Kali and she has her principal shrine at Cranganoor in the old Cochin State. For the Bharani festival pilgrims from all over Malabar congregate at the shrine. Every pilgrim brings with him a cock to be scarificed at the altar of the goddess and each village sends out a large number of pilgrims. After the bird is sacrificed at the altar, the pilgrim gets it back on payment of a small fee and the flesh is cooked near the shrine and eaten; to wash down the meat the pilgrims provide themselves with a good stock of arrack, a liquor distilled from the juice of the coconut palm.

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Until recently, it was considered the sacred duty of every pilgrim to sing obscene songs, from the time he left his home on the pligrimage till he returned. One of the diversions of the pilgrims at the shrine was the listening in and appreciation of competitive singing of songs by celebrated poets of the land. I have had occasion to listen to some of these, and it must be admitted that quite a number of these are works of genius possessing considerable literary merit. But unfortunately they are unprintable. These peculiar notions of pleasing the goddess are not approved of by enlightened Hindus. Public opinion against the singing of vulgar songs became too strong to be ignored, and the Maharajah of Cochin by a proclamation prohibited the practice.

पुस्तकालय
गुरुकुल काँगड़ी

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AND

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